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The Spurn of the Screw:

Henry James's Project of Perversion Management in Three Late Supernatural Tales

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Abstract

The Spurn of the Screw:

Henry James's Project of Perversion Management

in Three Late Supernatural Tales

Greg McSweeney

This study is a reading of three late supernatural tales by Henry James: "Owen Wingrave" (1892), *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), and "The Jolly Corner" (1908). The focus is on James's use of gothic conventions and rhetorical devices in an abiding project of perversion management, whereby unacceptable sexuality and sexual impulses are relegated to the register of the ghostly. James's use of preterition, prosopopoeia, and aposiopesis in the creation of a discursively gothic environment is discussed in the context of the Victorian idea of manhood, the precarious role of the governess, and the development of the urban American male of the early twentieth century.

All three texts harbour concerns about male same-sex desire, especially about the imperative to control, segregate, and eradicate it. This erasure is effected in all three texts, though never without tragic results. This study explores the ways in which James uses the conventions of gothic to portray that tragedy.

Acknowledgments

This is for
the prodigious Nicola Nixon
and for
the inordinately patient Elaine Bander.

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Introduction

James's late style presents an intricate and highly formal challenge even to the most alert reader. Many great artists, as they reach their mature stage, come to pare their work down to its essence. Stravinsky went from the bloated orchestral configuration of *Le Sacre du printemps* to the sparse chamber music of the 1940s; Picasso began with realism, moved into the fractured and sensational landscape of Cubism, and ended his career executing simple line drawings on white fields. Matisse, similarly, moved closer and closer to an ideal of pure form and colour, until at the and of his life he worked exclusively with large paper cut-outs, many of which became designs for giant stained-glass windows.

But James seems to have taken a contrary route, becoming more complex and subtle at the end of his career even than he was at its outset. His late style has led to accusations of artificiality, of being preoccupied with the local concerns of an elite class whose indulgent self-reflection fails to resonate globally. Certainly James is not always profound—no writer is—but profundity is exactly what is expected from a style this elevated; when one peers into the window of a gilt carriage, one expects to find royalty inside, and feels cheated by the presence of any lesser personage. As a result, some of the fiction of this period in his career seems stylistically top-heavy.

Some texts from this period are exceptions to this tendency, however; the supernatural tales of the twenty years surrounding the turn of the century are enhanced by the elaborate style, perhaps because the reader of gothic is familiar with the origins of that genre in the ornate language of Walpole and Radcliffe, and with its evolution

through the formal—though less intricate—styles of such sensational works as *The Woman in White* and *Dracula*. In the three texts with which this study is concerned, style and content are balanced, the formality of the language serving to lend authority to speakers who describe incredible and sometimes macabre events.

The choice of these three texts over any of the numerous shorter fictions from this stage in James's career was based on certain characteristics common to all three. That these stories are gothic is debatable; that they deploy gothic generic markers is not. The ghosts are here, the old houses, the winding central staircases, the strange manifestations that may or may not be supernatural—but most obvious are the absences or silences that in traditional gothic force the reader to make inferences, to interpret what is not there manifestly—or is manifestly not there.

My suggestion is that these absences or gaps are not authentically gothic, but are in fact manipulated in the same way in which late-nineteenth century concepts of male same-sex desire were manipulated: as discursive absences that acted as signifiers for homosexuality. Thus the *unspoken* of the gothic is appropriated in the service of the *unspeakable* of same-sex desire.

These absences are created in two ways; first, the accumulation of detail and hyper-articulation around the unspeakable serves to accentuate the blankness of the void that it surrounds, similar to the way in which Pointillist artists create darkness in patches of densely grouped dots of pigment, and blankness through their absence. The shape of the absence, of the blank canvas showing through, is described by the darker dots that surround it. Less poetically, but perhaps more to the point, the AIDS antibody test works in the same way; the researcher peering through the microscope sees not the virus itself,

but only the configuration and behaviour of the antibodies that it has activated. The explicit is unproblematic; the point of interest is what is *not* manifest. The presence of the virus is inferred; the configuration of the antibodies is the connotation upon which that inference is based.

It may be objected that reading antibodies is not like reading James (though I think he would like the idea of being read through a microscope), and that in the latter the use of connotation is polyvalent to the extent that narrowing its signification to something as specific as same-sex desire is tantamount to reading with an ideological agenda. Connotation is by definition the absence of enough data to constitute a *proof* of anything, but D.A. Miller reminds us that until recently,

> homosexuality offered not just the most prominent—it offered the only subject matter whose representation in American mass culture appertained exclusively to the shadow kingdom of connotation, where insinuations could be at once developed and denied, where...one couldn't be sure whether homosexuality was being meant at all, but on the chance it was, one also learned, along with the codes that might be conveying it, the silence necessary to keep about their deployment (124-25).

Miller's comments here pertain to homosexual representation in Hitchcock, not in James, but Eric Savoy discusses "The Jolly Corner" specifically in these terms, asserting that "the play of connotation is sufficiently elaborate to acquire a solidity, and a specificity, in differential relation to the signs of heteronormative American masculinity" ("Queer Subject" 2).

Connotation typically exists in opposition to denotation, and I suggest in the following chapters that James, in these tales, concretizes this correspondence in such a way that denotation becomes to connotation what heterosexual is to homosexual, and what living human is to ghost. After all, a convenient method of manipulating discursive absences in fiction is to personify them, to create them as characters who inhabit those absences; the ghost, as the connotative trace of the once-living human it represents, is a perfect metaphor for this kind of absence. Thus Owen Wingrave, Quint and Miles, and Spencer Brydon (in either his European or American form) exist in the register of the ghostly specifically because of their knowledge or experience of male same-sex desire. Once rendered discursively inert in this way (that is, real only outside of ordinary existence) they can be corralled, isolated, banished, or otherwise purged in the way that ghosts are typically dealt with in the authentic gothic. James, however, is corralling, isolating, banishing, and purging the same-sex desire that these ghosts represent.

Why is he enacting this murderous dynamic again and again at this time in his career? At this point in Jamesian criticism, psycho-biography constitutes an indulgence; Edel and Novick have separately given us their own pseudo-Jamesian narratives in their biographies of the man, which are saturated with both detail and connotation. The picture that emerges is of a figure whose same-sex erotic orientation was troubling to him (how could it be anything else in the years surrounding the turn of the century?) Novick, in particular, claims that "James's sexual orientation... has been an open secret for a hundred years" (xiii). That may be, but his use of the gothic was not always in the project of perversion management; in fact, he had previously used the genre in the depiction of tragic impediments to heterosexual marriage. In the period surrounding the grotesque

circus of the Wilde trials, however, and in the midst of the burgeoning pseudoscience of sexology—which pounced on, and virtually created the homosexual as an object of study—James began to rehearse the banishment scenario that occurs in the three tales of the present study. I suspect but claim no connection; the *idée fixe* is an artist's prerogative, after all. I point out only that for whatever reason, he is not content with a single enactment of this banishing. Like Jonathan Harker, whose relationship to his own monster is fraught with homoeroticism, James seems to be pounding a stake into the heart of same-sex desire with a fervor that usually signals frantic self-defense in the face of imminent danger.

My methodology, if that term can be used in the singular, is nominally psychoanalytic in that questions of ontology, identity formation, and ego awareness must be central to any reading of these tales. I am interested particularly in characters who are liminal, marginal, and situated on the threshold—both figuratively and narratively—and what that positioning indicates about identity and its connection with sexuality; in this sense my reading is queer. But at base, a reading of these dense, insinuating tales must begin with a simple close textual analysis by which the relevant critical material may be isolated before being subsequently pressed into ideological service. The absences in these texts do not swagger—they lurk, and a degree of old-fashioned detective work is required in their uncovering.

The chapters that follow are arranged by the chronology of the primary texts. The first of these, "Owen Wingrave," was published in 1892, and my reading of it is informed by critics whose influence will extend throughout this study. Tzevetan Todorov suggests that James's short fiction of this period is "based on *the quest for an absent and absolute*

cause" (145). Absence is the very engine of "Owen Wingrave," beginning with Owen's having absented himself from military service, and refusing to give meaning to that absence by explaining his action—or absence of action. And so Spencer Coyle, his tutor, has as his project the interpretation of his former student's silence. Coyle has lived in the belief that the reality he perceives is objective and universal; Owen's sudden and unexplained balking at military service forces the tutor to re-evaluate his own beliefs, and though he probes the student's silence initially as the agent of the Wingrave family, he quickly comes to sympathize with the younger man, if only in secret.

But that is not the only absence in "Owen Wingrave"; through disinheritance and virtual shunning by his family, he himself becomes an absence, in the way that a ghost is the absent 'presence' of the living person it represents. And without delay, Owen is relegated to the domain of ghosts, the haunted room where a Wingrave ancestor has killed his own son over an argument whose content is unknown, or at least unacknowledged. Owen dies in the room. A ghost kills another ghost; an absence removes another, more immediately dangerous absence, and a sort of social homeostasis is restored. The nature of Owen's threat to the dominant culture as represented here by the opinions of his family is the focal absence of the story, and in that connection I will refer to Ed Cohen's *Talk on the Wilde Side*, which contextualizes public perceptions of masculinity and of homosexuality in and about the time of the publication of "Owen Wingrave," three years before the Wilde trials. I will also consider Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's connecting of negativizing language and homosexuality in this period, and Eric Savoy's account of the scandal known as the Cleveland Street affair. Finally, I will

discuss Jonathan Dollimore's article on the Augustinian idea of perversion as privative, and of the distinction between the pervert and the perverse.

In *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), the governess takes on her own ordeal of interpretation, with disastrous results. The novella is the best-known of these three texts, and perhaps the most continuously popular of all of James's works. Countless volumes have been written on it, many of which address the debate over the reality of the ghosts of the valet, Peter Quint, and the former governess, Miss Jessel. That debate need not be rehearsed here, though in the relevant chapter I do acknowledge my agreement with Goddard's account of the provenance of the apparitions. In my reading, the objective existence of the ghosts is immaterial: they are real to the governess, and the events of the story proceed from *that* reality.

My reading is informed by Goddard, and includes references to other critics on specific points. I refer to Rictor Norton's essay on the story for his description of the physical action of a screw, and its applicability to the motifs of union and resolution. Shoshanna Felman is of course influential in her discussion of framing in the story, and her identification of the reading dynamic at work. Otherwise, I depend primarily in this chapter on a close reading of the text, focusing especially on the moments at which the apparitions appear to the governess. I trace the trajectory of her inferences from the plausible to the outlandish, as she piles supposition upon supposition, each based on a previous misinterpretation of her own narrative. The source of her misreading is not the absence of information, in *her* mind at least; it lies rather in her attempt to find meaning in the information she does have. For the governess, the very fact of Quint and Miss Jessel has insidious implications regarding the children of whose care she is in charge.

Entrusted with the conflicting roles of governess and master of Bly, she reads (and writes) the roles of victim and perpetrator into the children and the revenants, respectively. The menace represented by the ghosts is necessarily sexual because it emanates from the domain of the silent, the unspeakable. In life, Quint and Miss Jessel committed transgressions of class and propriety, as well as whatever abuse they perpetrated on the children. Now in the realm of the 'erased,' their focus has narrowed to a final, catastrophic 'possession' of the children. This threat is even more dire because of the same-sex abuse of Miles by Quint. Precocious sexual knowledge is itself abhorrent—sexual knowledge between males can have only one result: a relegation to the unspeakable, the invisible, the ghostly.

The third chapter will deal with "The Jolly Corner," the most intransigent and opaque of these three texts. Since Spencer Brydon's dilemma is based on his perceived inadequacy as an American male at the beginning of the twentieth century, I refer to Greenberg's and Bystryn's article, "Capitalism, Bureaucracy, and Homosexuality," which contextualizes the appearance of the "bureaucratic personality" as synonymous with the male personality in the urban United States at that time. I also cite Barbara Hardy, who seems typical in her opinion that the story ends happily, thanks largely to Alice Staverton and to the "redemptive" qualities of heterosexual love. I allude as well to Butler's concept of performative gender and to Bersani's more poignant description of drag as a melancholy homage.

James's use of certain rhetorical devices resounds in all three of these texts. Preterition is the act of mentioning something for the sole purpose of refusing to discuss that thing; it is disavowal through acknowledgment. In conversation, a preterative

utterance has the effect of making the speaker seem to possess knowledge that he will not share, whether through disinclination or in the belief that his interlocutor is already aware of that knowledge. In fiction, however, such an utterance—whether or not the interlocutor already shares the speaker's knowledge—leaves the reader with an informational gap that must subsequently be interpreted. It is an element of the text, and has been included for a reason, and yet it is essentially non-textual. Such utterances occur in all three stories. In "Owen Wingrave," preterition marks the climax of Coyle's interrogation of Owen. In the governess's tale, it is extremely provocative; her father is mentioned as having "eccentric habits," Quint's death is related in highly enigmatic and puzzling terms, and Miles is shown to be under the impression that Flora has never been taken away from Bly. The most compelling reason to focus on these preterative moments is that if they are not to be interpreted as absences of information, then they are utterly arbitrary—mere extraneous detail—and that is clearly not James's habit. The preterative material in "The Jolly Corner" is in Brydon's scant allusions to the kind of life he lead in Europe, and its contrast with the changes he will have to make if he wishes to stay in America.

The most pervasive device in "The Jolly Corner," however, is prosopopoeia. In an act that is suitably like giving the screw a second turn, prosopopoeia is the rhetorical device of literalizing or concretizing a rhetorical figure. An act that combines performativity with personification, it gives physical presence to mere utterance. Brydon conceives of the American self he might have been, and manifests that self through a series of nocturnal hunts that focus his projective energy on that prey. Fortunately for

Brydon, prosopopoeial figures are as ephemeral as they are frightening, and when he comes to his senses in Alice's lap at the story's end, the horrifying spectre is gone.

Alice's rhetorical signature is her use of aposiopesis, the act of cutting off an utterance with the effect of either forcing an interlocutor to complete the thought, or simply amplifying its possible significance by leaving it hanging in the air. "Surely you can't believe that I would be capable of--!" is typical of such an utterance. It is ultimately manipulative, in that the interlocutor cannot decently demur from reacting. My reading of Alice Staverton is congruent with her use of this device, which seems to me to be passive-aggressive.

Several terms relating to sexual orientation should be defined here, since they are relevant to my reading of these three stories, and appear in some of the references I have included. They are problematic to those to whom they are applied, and are even more so to those who fall outside their application. 'Homosexual,' a barbarism combining a Greek prefix and a Latin root, was born of an optimistic philanthropy in the 1860s when coined by Karl-Maria Kertbeny, who hoped it would replace 'pederast,' a derogatory term in common usage in his native Germany at that time. His optimism proved ill-founded, but his coinage survived when it was appropriated by neuropsychologist Richard Krafft-Ebing, who used the term in his famous *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886, thereby giving the word both a patina of scientific legitimacy and a pathological connotation that was subsequently mitigated but never removed by Freud. The objection to the term is that its use has never been either scientific or objective, any more than its back-formation, 'heterosexual,' has. In all discourse—scientific or otherwise—'heterosexual' means 'normal,' and 'homosexual' means 'deviant.' This is the sense in which it is currently

deployed by the political and religious right, for the alarmist power of the deviant connotation it carries. The term was available and recognizable by the public in the period in which the three stories under discussion were written.

'Gay' is an innocuous word that is as value-neutral a label as has hitherto been found to identify a person whose erotic object is of the same gender as him- or herself. It was appropriated on a large scale during the so-called sexual revolution of the '60s and early '70s (a revolution whose provenance was an oral contraceptive can hardly be considered revolutionary to non-heterosexual men, except in there having occurred a general relaxing of sexual attitudes at this time). 'Gay' had been used in Great Britain in the nineteenth century in reference to female prostitutes and heterosexual playboys, but became connotative of male same-sex desire and activity in the United States by the end of the Second World War, though its currency in this respect in Europe dates from a decade later[1].

'Gay studies,' the approach that has been superseded by queer theory, is now seen as somewhat naïve, capitulative, and apologetic. It sought to integrate and to legitimize a gay presence in both the academy and society by bringing 'gay' into the centre from its marginalized status. Queer theory was born of the limitations of and dissatisfaction with gay studies, and seeks, among its goals, to perform analyses that "reveal complicated cultural strategies for the regulations of sexual behaviour that often result in the oppression of sexual dissidents who violate sexual taboos or don't conform to culturally sanctioned gender roles" (Wikholm 6). The 'theory' as such is thus originally and primarily sociological; as for the 'queer' component, Annamarie Jagose suggests that

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[1] Beale, Paul, ed. *Partridge's Concise Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English: from the Work of Eric Partridge*. New York: Macmillan, 1989. 178.

> there is no generally acceptable definition of queer; nevertheless, the inflection of queer that has proved most disruptive to received understandings of identity, community and politics is the one that problematises normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality—and that, consequently, is critical of all those versions of identity, community and politics that are believed to evolve 'naturally' from such consolidations (99).

Queer theory, then, is not definable as a stable set of assumptions in the way that gay studies could be; it is a relational process in which the identity of both subject and object of study are under constant interrogation.

I have said that the terminology of same-sex desire is relevant to my discussion of the three texts in question, but it is also true that this reading was not undertaken with the goal of finding queer effects. They are epiphenomenal, but consistent. Problems of identity, performance, normativity, and unsanctioned erotic desire surface regularly out of the gaps, silences, and rhetorical devices that I discuss in the following chapters. Rictor Norton concludes his essay by suggesting that *The Turn of the Screw* is "an attempt by James to exorcise homosexual feelings within himself, which he perceived to be sinful and which he could not bring himself to admit and to incorporate within a healthy sense of self" (9). James's biography is not the object of this study, but if he was using the supernatural fiction of this period to distance himself from the only sexual life in which he could have found fulfillment—if he is in effect spurning the screw—then the elaborate, formal style of this period is an elegant counter-balance to a content that is horrifying beyond the mere supernatural.

Friendly Fire:

Perversion Management through Erasure in "Owen Wingrave"

The narrative particulars of "Owen Wingrave" comprise a document of inversions: bureaucracy is private, residential space public; women are fathers, men are children; a dynastic structure is populated and weakened by peripheral, parasitic figures; pedagogues are taught by their students; murder is curative, and pacifism villainous. In James things are often other than they seem, and in this story, the narrative functions almost as a photographic negative from which the reader must piece together a picture based on oppositions embedded in and subversive of the manifest content.

The contemporary reader's first task is to overcome the text's most gaping inversion, which initially appears to be the *raison d'être* of the story. Wingrave seems so obviously homosexual that it is inevitable that his death be interpreted as a punishment for a seditious straying from the patriarchal, heteronormalized stance that is mandatory for all owners of phalluses, and for his subsequent failure to realize the enormity of that transgression. Wingrave is unrepentant—even complacent—in the grip of his apparent sodomitical perdition, and it is tempting to see his death as an act of erasure, of the removal of an anachronistic sin through a political and gothicized vanishing of the sinner in the service of a stable patriarchy.

In Radcliffe's *Udolfo*, Emily St. Aubin is cast out of the protective orbit of the patriarchal regime because of her sexual recklessness—her allowing of a young gentleman to kiss her during a brief unchaperoned moment. In the course of a seemingly endless sequence of excoriating experiences, Emily learns the dark side of male power,

and, having renounced her foolish impulse to self-determination, is welcomed back into the sanctuary of the patriarchal web, though with the mark of an unbecoming history of willfulness forever branded upon her. Similarly, having refused to uphold the family honour by entering into and excelling in a homosocial and explicitly homophobic environment, Owen Wingrave dies, as he must, of shame. In this sense, he inhabits the degenerative paradigm of the gothic hero in transit through the sensational to the domestic—of a Rochester, for example, who has been brought in off the moors, and whose free-floating gynophobic rage has been appropriately scaled down to the petty vicissitudes of the pantry.

The family hearth, filled not with ghosts but with living relatives, is the gothic space in "Owen Wingrave," and the family name represents the standard of which Owen falls short. James's choice of the character's name is, as usual, instructive: in this family, it is not permitted simply to live and die as fate dictates—one must achieve a military life's work that ensures an honorable death; preferably earned in the armed defense of one's country—in effect, one must 'win' one's 'grave.' To the family this is 'owed'. Owen has rejected this traditional directive, however; he has no desire to die as his father did, under the blade of "an Afghan sabre," choosing instead to read Goethe, of all things—texts designed to render an already sensitive young man positively teary. The problem for Owen is not a lack of identity, as it is in both "The Jolly Corner" and *The Turn of the Screw*; rather, the conflict arises from the fact that a certain kind of identity has solidified and remains immovable, despite the expectations of family and friends and despite explicit instruction in the art of the most radical conformity in Western culture: the preparation for military life.

On the narrative level, the story is uncomplicated: young Wingrave, from a family whose men have always had military careers, and whose women expect and embrace their own roles as home-base support, declares to his tutor his unwillingness to enter the military, for reasons, we are later told, that are ideological. The tutor visits Wingrave's aunt, who is outraged, and who subsequently summons him to the family homestead for a weekend in order to knock some sense into her wayward nephew. Wingrave's friend, Lechmere, is invited for the same purpose. At the Wingrave home we are introduced to several characters, most of whom have a social rather than biological connection to the family, including Kate Julian, whose status vis-à-vis Wingrave as an erotic object remains unclear. Coyle, the tutor, gradually comes to sympathize with Wingrave, and becomes worried about the pressure being applied to him. Kate, apparently contemptuous of his decision to abandon his familial duty, goads him into staying overnight in the room where an ancestor killed his own son in a fit of rage. In the morning, she finds Wingrave's lifeless body in the room.

Though the manifest story is clear, the question of the narrator is more complicated. The title leads the reader to expect that the protagonist will be Owen, but in fact he meets none of the criteria for that position. Even in the technical sense of the word he is disqualified: he can hardly be considered the principal 'actor' when the story's conflict is based specifically on his *refusal* to act. Though he has a demonstrable psychology, we must infer its nature through his actions, and guess at his motivations. Coyle puts to him the very questions the reader would like to ask, but Owen dismisses every possibility except for the one he refuses to disclose We are not privy to his thoughts, except insofar as he is willing to articulate them to other characters, and the

truthfulness of his utterances is proportionally unclear. Though he has evidently undergone an ideological transformation before the story begins, he is a static and opaque figure, an interpretive absence from the beginning of the story until its end.

The title "Owen Wingrave" decoys the reader away from the true protagonist, who is Spencer Coyle, the tutor, also referred to as Owen's "crammer," to the delight of the queer reader. Coyle is an involved bystander, a character who participates in the events of the story, and whose witnessing is presented for the reader in the third person limited in such a way that our ascertaining of the facts must be a reception of or reaction to his version of the events. He is emphatically unlike the genderless and vaguely self-satisfied "compromised participant observer" of *The Sacred Fount*, for example, as identified by Carolyn Porter. Coyle is much more forthright in his interaction with other characters. He is not present at every moment in the story—when Owen is reading Goethe in the park, for example—but on the few occasions when he is absent, the scene is objective and unambiguous, requiring no intervening consciousness to colour the words or actions of others. Most importantly, Coyle is the only character in the story who evolves, who comes to embrace a world view previously antithetical to everything his profession has stood for, and in this evolution he is the student of his student. Though Coyle finds himself following Owen's ideological trajectory, however, his destination turns out to be different from that of the younger man, a point to which I will return shortly.

Coyle is mobile, and Owen, until recently, has been too. The other characters in "Owen Wingrave" can be situated in a sort of ideological *tableau vivant*, the better to emphasize the unquestioned immobility of their belief systems. Those characters resident

at Paramore, whether family members or permanent guests, are of a single world view. Jane Wingrave, the martial matriarch, is described as remarkably free of traditionally feminine attributes: she is the law, the commander-in-chief at the faded fortress that is Paramore. Her father is the titular head of the family, but like so many leaders in that position, he is for show only, a silent glaring symbol of the past, a sort of superannuated agent brought in from cold, tending now to "the diminished honours of his house" (561). Mrs. Julian, her own family having a military history, and she herself having narrowly missed becoming Jane Wingrave's sister-in-law by virtue of her military brother, evidently approves of the profession; her daughter, Kate, pays it lip service at least, her relation to the family transpiring principally on a personal level with Owen. Kate's reaction to his refusal to enlist, for example, may be only another form of the insulting banter that characterizes her proprietary attitude toward Paramore and its owners; her condemnation of him seems perfunctory and superficial, based more on her expected alliance with the Wingraves than on any deep conviction on her part.

Of the characters not connected to Paramore, Owen's friend, Lechmere, is utterly unquestioning of the profession of soldiering, and never entertains for a moment the possibility that his friend Owen might be onto something in considering it "barbaric." Lechmere is the ideal young soldier: malleable, predictable, unintellectual, and comfortable as a minor link in the great homosocial chain of military command that will govern his professional life. The fluently bilingual James names this character appropriately: in French, *faire de la lèche auprès de quelq'un* is "to toady to, to suck up to some one"[1]; ungenerously put, this is a description of a soldier's necessary attitude,

[1] Mansion, J.E. *Harrap's New Shorter French and English Dictionary* (see Works Cited.)

which is to suppress his own volition in deference to that of the authority of the next highest rank, all in the service of advancing his career.

Mrs. Coyle, "a fair fresh slow woman," is problematic in that she seems at first to function neither dramatically nor structurally. If she has a role, it seems, it is to give the reader, through Coyle, the civilian, impartial view of Wingrave. Between her and her husband, her avowed "love" for the young novitiate is a running joke: Coyle "had accused the good lady more than once of being in love with Owen Wingrave. She admitted that she was, she even gloried in her passion; which shows that the subject, between them, was treated in a liberal spirit" (569). This is a performative utterance on Mrs. Coyle's part. In making a joking confession of her erotic attraction to the younger man, she plunks the information down on the domestic table in plain sight of her husband, whose nonchalant reaction licenses it, even makes him complicit. Additionally, by naming her desire for Owen, she can believe she has tamed it, brought it under her control. Her relationship with her husband's student is heedless of rank or station, and is indicative of her attitude towards the military: she considers her husband's work a livelihood, an activity that provides them an income. Later, at Paramore, she will staunchly denounce the Wingraves for their harassment of Owen, but this act stems from her erotic attraction to him rather than from an innate pacifism that conflicts with her husband's work. Her allegiances are personal and unregimented. Unlike Mrs. Julian, for instance, she can live on the margins of military life without absorbing it into her world view.

These characters are ideologically static; they neither interrogate their own beliefs nor consider that opposing views may contain any merit whatsoever. Technically, this

group contains Owen himself, since from the beginning to the end of the story he maintains a single pacifist stance. Though presumably he has started out in the dominant, pro-military position, he deviates from it gradually (over the four or five years before the story begins, according to Lechmere) until his anti-war sentiments culminate in the confrontation with Coyle that opens the story.

This confrontation is in fact the starting point of Coyle's ideological migration. His reaction to Owen's balking at military service is a nearly apoplectic outrage. He considers Owen "seditious," and accuses him of "corrupting the youth of Athens." The language in which he describes the student's behaviour at this point implies that he considers it perverse not only in terms of Owen's dereliction of his duty to national security, but also in terms of the example the young man will set for his fellow trainees. Coyle's allusion to Greek youth is ostensibly martial, but it also evokes the practice of socially sanctioned pederasty or 'training' that is tied to any mention of the ancient Greek military.[2] To Coyle, Owen's demurral from armed service is a perversion both public and private, visible and invisible.

It does not take very long, however, for his hitherto unquestioned convictions to give way to his affection for Owen: while there is no indication that Coyle ultimately renounces the military profession or his role in it, his recognition of the sincerity of Owen's convictions begins to license the younger man even before the party's decampment to Paramore:

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[2] There was a revival of Hellenism at the end of the 19th century. James Eli Adams discusses this revival in connection with the evolving idea of Victorian masculinity and the writings of Pater, in *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995). Linda Dowling and Richard Dellamora have also written on the phenomenon.

> He could so easily see that there were all sorts of things in his young friend that the people of Paramore wouldn't understand. He began even already to react against the notion of his being harassed—to reflect that after all he had a right to his ideas—to remember that he was of a substance too fine to be handled with blunt fingers (565).

Almost against his will, Coyle has recovered the empathy he has always had for Owen. Moments later, an exchange takes place between Coyle and Lechmere that actually creates an agency between the "crammer" and his former student; Lechmere reports a conversation that took place between Owen and him, relating that he had warned his friend that his refusal to enter the army might be taken socially as a lack of "[t]he military temperament." He goes on to ask Coyle to guess Owen's irrational response to this suggestion, to which Coyle retorts, "Damn the military temperament!" Lechmere is nonplussed, "uncertain if he were attributing the phrase to Wingrave or uttering his own opinion" (567). The unresolved ambiguity of this ejaculation leaves the reader wondering the same thing, regardless of whether or not Coyle is aware of his own sympathy for Owen at this point.

By the time he and Mrs. Coyle are dressing for dinner on their first night at Paramore, and her vehement defense of Wingrave is uttered, Coyle realizes that "the good lady only expressed the sympathy which, under cover of regarding his late inmate as a rare exception, he had already recognized in his own soul" (570). From this point onward, his only effort regarding Owen is his avoidance of the duty he was summoned to Paramore to perform, that of reintegrating the younger

man into the dominant belief system, of literally 'recruiting' him back into the army. Though Coyle will stop short of renouncing the military life or his role in it, his ultimate recognition that Owen's convictions and principles are just as rigid and exigent as those of the military (though always private, not public) leads him to begin entertaining the legitimacy of conscientious objection.

In this sense, Owen and Coyle are alone in their mobility, though Owen's repositioning has taken place before the story begins, while Coyle's occurs over the course of the narrative. The other difference is that Owen's transgression, his perversity, is manifest and public—though based on private motivations—while Coyle's less 'seditious' perversity remains covert. Owen is disowned, and Coyle, in the military terms that fall so easily into this discussion, becomes an infiltrator in the system he has made a career of serving so transparently.

So the only visible deviant in the story is Owen Wingrave. This accounts for his ostracism by the Wingraves at Paramore, but not for the extremity of their reaction. Granted, the family profession may be of three centuries' standing, but if public status were the family's concern, an abundance of hierarchical institutions existed at this time through which a young Englishman might honorably displace his battlefield prowess onto the arenas of finance, law, or commerce. Such a course would be unacceptable to the Wingraves, however, since the entirety of their identity as a family derives from their occupation—and preoccupation—with the activity of regulated, state-sanctioned aggression.

The nature of Owen's disentitlement is interesting in that it occurs both domestically as a permanent rupture of his relationships with members of the

family, and also financially as the erasure of an investment that will from this date pay no dividends, by the Wingraves' definition of that term. Though Owen retains a measure of financial support inherited from his mother, his aunt has cut off his branch of the family tree by removing him from her will, a legal instrument that combines the language and arithmetical calculation of the masculine Symbolic with the historical preoccupation with lineage and inheritance. What is a will, after all, but a family tree with presents hanging from its limbs? Now, just as his mother has provided for him in her death through a feminine bestowal, his aunt will deprive him through a masculine deprivation.

In his deviation from the family directive, he is as functionally dead to them as Owen's mother is, and just as invisible. Owen may have implicitly accused his family of barbarism in refusing military service, but his reasons for doing so remain undisclosed and mysterious. And they remain unspoken precisely because the Wingraves have no interest in, nor compunction to weigh those reasons before disowning the young man. Why is the simple trajectory of his deviation—rather than the substance of it—sufficient cause for this catastrophic severing from the family?

Jonathan Dollimore phrases the question more generally: "Why should the prima-facie innocent activity of *departure* be so abhorrent? Why... is there the rapid slippage from divergence to evil... [and] why should this deviation *from* something be seen also, instantly, as a wicked subversion *of* it?" (11). There is both an obvious answer and a more obscure one. Common sense indicates that some one who willfully spurns the dominant system (culture, organization, what

have you) is dangerous because he must possess knowledge of which the collective is ignorant. It cannot be the other way around, since the deviant has been raised and acculturated within the confines of that collective. All the knowledge at the disposal of the collective has been made available to the deviant such that his normative mature identity should be in conformity with the criteria of that collective. When this paradigm of identity formation is seen to fail, the threat is triply menacing: first, the greater knowledge on the part of the deviant implies a flipping of the dominant/subordinate binary—he who knows more has the greater power. Second, the knowledge possessed by the deviant must have come from within the collective to begin with, but has been (mis-)received, (mis-) interpreted, or (mis-)recognized only by the deviant, rather than by the collective or its sanctioned representatives. This perceived treachery from within is threatening because of the fragility or vulnerability it exposes in the collective. And finally, the pervert is the ultimate negative role model: he poses the perennial danger of recruitment through example. If an individual can be seen to thrive outside the rarified atmosphere of the collective, then one less tool is available to ensure conformity within that group.

These ominous qualities accrue to Owen simply as a result of his digging in his heels on the question of military service. The great identitificatory narrative of the Wingrave family history seems destined to end abruptly through the act—or rather the refusal to act—of a lone, renegade member of that family. This perverse stasis on Owen's part is enough to indict him in the eyes of the Wingraves and those about whose opinions they concern themselves. But

Dollimore suggests a more obscure dynamic by his tracing of the Western metaphysic to Augustine's theory of evil as privative, as the absence of good. This theory itself was a response to the Manichean so-called heresy, which posed the theistic riddle: If God is willing to prevent evil but unable to do so, then he is impotent. If able but unwilling, he is malevolent. If he is both able and willing, how does evil exist? To shelter the idea of God from this interrogation, Augustine formulated a theory in which evil is not a positive force coexistent with good, but rather simply the lack, or privation, of good. Dollimore explains the link of privation and perversion:

> The idea of evil simply as lack could never explain its destructive power. This is *why at the heart of Augustinian privation is perversion.* Perversion becomes a main criterion of evil, mediating between evil as lack and evil as agency. That is, perversion becomes something utterly inimical to authentic being, yet without authentic being itself (13).

Just as evil is the absence of good, so is perversion the absence of a true ontology. The deviant has no reality. He is a ghost, and on this level Owen becomes invisible in a second way—invisible not only within the family structure, but also in the dominant moral system. It is the act of turning away from or rejecting what his family has determined as good that constitutes Owen's perverse status; in other words, the subject before his perversion is not evil, nor does he become evil during his perverse state. It is only the active trajectory of his straying from the sanctioned good, the true, the straight and narrow, that is evil. Owen need not declare his reasons for refusing military service, or disclose what that decision

reveals about his character; morally, such explanations are self-evident. This detaching of deviation from the deviant is essentially the current Catholic position regarding perversion: hate the act, not the actor; the sin, not the sinner. As Dollimore points out: "Here is the beginning of a theory which will become the rationale for a history of untold violence: *'essentially,' perversion becomes the negative agency within privation'* (13).

Owen Wingrave, then, is not himself evil; it is his act of 'desertion,' of going AWOL from the family and the social role it inhabits that brands him perverse, that infuses him with a taint that could be removed at any time if only he were to come to his senses. The terminal point of his perverse trajectory is surely unobjectionable: when Coyle asks him what he intends to do instead of soldiering, Owen replies, "I don't know—perhaps nothing... [o]nly something peaceful!" (572). As for his having received knowledge from within the collective that has somehow escaped its other members, we need refer only to Lechmere's first attempt to sound Owen out on the subjects of war and honour. The two apparently share a common socio-economic background. They have been to the same or similar schools and have evidently read the same books; in effect, they are members of a single interpretive community. And yet Owen's take on their shared culture and history is diametrically opposed to Lechmere's. The latter, reporting this conversation to Coyle, is dumbfounded at Owen's dismissal of war as barbaric and especially scandalized by his condemnation of war's great practitioners: "And he thinks all the great generals ought to have been shot, and that Napoleon Bonaparte in particular, the greatest, was a scoundrel, a criminal, a

monster for whom language has no adequate name!" (565-66). James suggests that Owen's condemnation of Napoleon must have smarted, for Coyle himself, in his function as a tutor of young men for war, has already been compared explicitly by the narrator to the diminutive French general.

Almost immediately after this conversation between Lechmere and Coyle, the scene moves to Paramore, the Wingrave homestead, where Coyle finds Owen looking "five years older" than when he saw him last, and the two take a stroll around the grounds. This is the setting for an extraordinary conversational moment between the two that combines preterition with ambiguity in such a way that the reader has no choice but to step outside the narrative and reinterpret a passage that meant something different on a second reading. Owen is reporting to Coyle the dire reaction of his family to the news of his rejection of military life. His grandfather, apparently, has been especially vocal, subjecting Owen to any number of epithets—possibly even speaking the unspeakable:

> "He called me—he called me—" Here Owen faltered and his voice failed him. He looked as haggard as was possible to a young man in such splendid health.
>
> "I probably know!" said Spencer Coyle with a nervous laugh.
>
> His companion's clouded eyes...rested for an instant on a distant object. Then they met his own and for another moment sounded them deeply. "It isn't true. No, it isn't. It's not *that*!"
>
> "I don't suppose it is! But what *do* you propose instead of it?"
>
> "Instead of what?"

"Instead of the stupid solution of war. If you take that away you should suggest at least a substitute" (571).

Owen is here literally unable to articulate whatever label his grandfather has attached to him, and yet Coyle seems to have gotten the message unequivocally, and the import of that message makes him "nervous." In a strictly preterative utterance, Owen both acknowledges and disavows his grandfather's insult, and, like the reader, Coyle has filled in the semantic gap left by the younger man's speechlessness.

But this decentering is further obfuscated by Coyle's next remark, asking Owen what alternative he offers to "it." The "it" appears initially to refer to the "that" which in turn refers to the trio of "it"s in Owen's frantic denial. In other words, Coyle's question on the first reading is this: What alternative do you propose to the fact or supposition of your homosexuality? Owen, understandably startled and uneasy, asks for clarification, and Coyle then reveals his own question to have been a *non sequitur* regarding international conflict resolution. Relieved to have moved on, Owen takes the opportunity to launch into a surprisingly violent tirade against "governments and cabinets," the law-makers who guide the war machine at the top of the domestic level; seen from his perspective, *they* are the perverts deviating from the good, the true, the salutary path of the common weal.

To the Wingraves, Owen's trajectory of turning away from the dominant ethos constitutes his perversion. Yet he has turned from the majoritarian stance (soldier) to a position not simply of minority (conscientious objector) but of non-

entity or absence (pervert), as illustrated in his conversation with Coyle. And he has seen both sides of the question of military life, unlike citizens of the dominant culture as represented by his family. Owen's invisibility and his surplus of knowledge brand him a spy, a chaotic element that threatens the reputation and the very perpetuation of the family, who behave as though they were about to succumb to dynastic failure.

The figure of the secret, seditious element at work in the breast of its host was, as Eric Savoy notes, circulating in the public consciousness at this time. He relates the story of a scandal that unfolded throughout 1889 and 1890, two years before the appearance of "Owen Wingrave." The scandal occurred, according to Savoy, at this time when medical, psychiatric, and judicial bodies were preoccupied with the examination, segregation, and persecution of the emerging male homosexual as a person—as an identity that was replacing or amalgamating the set of hitherto discrete (and usually discreet) unnatural acts perpetrated by those not previously considered 'homosexual' in the ontological sense. This public preoccupation with and concomitant anxiety over the homosexual's plying his corrupting practices covertly, in the midst of society, culminated in the Wilde trials of 1995, by which time a spectacular sacrifice to normative values was required for the reassurance of the population, who had begun to believe that they couldn't throw a rock over their collective shoulder without hitting a lurking homosexual.[3]

[3] James had in fact met Wilde socially a decade earlier in Washington, D.C., and pronounced him "an unclean beast," also making his famous remark to Mrs. Henry Adams that Wilde was a "fatuous cad" (Edel 273). James's social circle connected him tenuously and indirectly with Wilde, for whom he continued to

The scandal related by Savoy became known as the Cleveland Street Affair, and involved the procuring of young male postal employees for the sexual delectation of an upper-class male clientele. The reaction to the discovery of this enterprise was as might be expected, public horror and fascination. The young men in question seem to have felt no extreme contrition; rather, they appear to have been more upset over the loss of a supplementary income. The reaction of the General Post Office, however, was more complex: they of course exhibited the obligatory revulsion and made the appropriate disavowals of complicity, but more importantly, they displayed great anxiety over the integrity of the bureaucracy itself. They reacted corporately exactly as the Wingraves react domestically, comparing the presence of this secret business to "the discovery that some vitally important government network had been made 'insecure' after being infiltrated by aliens. It was as if they had found spies in their own citadel" (qtd. in Savoy 290).

Naturally, the Post Office professed concern over the sensitivity of the information handled by the postal employees, information presumably now available to their clandestine customers, but what really seems to have destabilized the managerial echelon of the bureaucracy is the fact that these seemingly innocuous employees, who were going about their transparent business under surveillance on the one hand, were simultaneously engaged in prohibited, potentially seditious behaviour on the other. They had been hiding, as it were, in plain sight. Just as the Wingrave family is shaken by their own inadvertent

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express his contempt, but Savoy reports that James manifested "a thorough fascination, however fearful, with the Wilde proceedings" (295).

production of a pervert from within their ranks, so was the Post Office outraged more by the *trajectory* of their employees' straying from the good and the true than with the nature of the unauthorized activities themselves. The actual presence of homosexuality and prostitution seems to have been almost epiphenomenal in the eyes of the bureaucrats. For Owen's part, his undertaking of military training is his own version of hiding in plain sight, ostensibly toeing the normative line, but having decided some years earlier that it was a life in which he would never participate.

In Augustinian theodicy, then, Owen and the General Post Office employees are perverts not in the specifics of their deviant goal, but only in their straying. Our contemporary idea of what constitutes a pervert is of course based on Freud, whose definition is narrower: a pervert is simply anyone who engages in sexual activity whose ultimate goal is other than genital, procreative intercourse. In figurative terms this deviation takes three major paths: synecdoche (the substitution of a body part for the entire body) metonymy (the substitution of an object associated with the body or a part thereof) and agency (the substitution of a same-sex libidinal object choice for one of a different sex). By these criteria, obviously, there are very few non-perverts at large in the world; our invisibility lies in our ubiquity. Before Freud, however, the pervert's invisibility resulted from his discursive and therefore social erasure. Mrs. Coyle's performative utterance regarding her erotic desire for Owen has tamed the impulse through naming it, but late-Victorian perverse desire was given not even this tentative existence. To name it would have been to grant it visibility, even provisionally,

and that prospect simply had too much potential for chaos. In silence there was deniability and containment.

If the perversion lies in the trajectory, it must still be acknowledged that trajectories have terminal points, and in James's short fiction of the 1890s, that that terminus is usually absence. Tzvetan Todorov devotes an entire chapter to the presence of absence as a motivating force in James's short fiction from 1892, the date of publication of "Owen Wingrave," to 1903, five years before "The Jolly Corner." Todorov asserts that the "Jamesian narrative is always based on *the quest for an absolute and absent cause*" (145). Here "absolute" signifies that all the elements of the story exist because of this cause, which may be a person, an object, a memory, or a secret, which does not actually appear in the narrative, but whose existence is the driving force behind it. Structurally, says Todorov, the "quest proceeds; the tale consists of the search for, the pursuit of, this initial cause, this primal essence. The narrative stops when it is attained." And finally, "the secret of Jamesian narrative is precisely the existence of an essential secret, of something not named, of an absent and superpowerful force which sets the whole present machinery of the narrative in motion" (145).

The engine of "Owen Wingrave" is precisely this sort of secret or gap in knowledge: Owen's reasons for rejecting the military, the knowledge of which would reveal his true nature. Lechmere tells Coyle that Owen's objections are simply pacifistic, but this report rings hollow to the reader. Lechmere has been introduced as something less than a powerful intellect, and Owen has most certainly put him off with a facile explanation simply to end the younger student's

clumsy campaign of persuasion. He may in fact have been trying out this cover on Lechmere to judge its reception before presenting it to the more penetrating interrogation of the group at Paramore.

The family's reaction is of course a rejection of Owen's rejection. At Paramore, his decision is not seen as a positive action at all; rather, it is described in terms of lack or negation. In an interview with Coyle, Kate Julian declares of Owen's behaviour "that such conduct doesn't begin to be that of a gentleman!" which leads to Coyle's silent observation that Kate is "a damsel who placed her ideal of manhood... in the type of the belted warrior" (580). In holding this ideal Kate is representative of the tenants of Paramore. Even Lechmere has played what he thought was his trump card during one of his sessions with Owen: he reports to Coyle that he warned Owen to expect "the worst" in reaction to his decision. Coyle tells him to define "worst": "Once more, for a few seconds, with his conscious eyes in his instructor's, the young man delayed. " 'Why what we spoke of a few hours ago. The appearance he'd present of not having--' The honest youth faltered afresh, but brought it out: 'The military temperament, don't you know?'" (566-67). So Owen is *not* a gentleman, and *not* a soldier. These attributes of lack cluster around him and contrast vividly with the descriptors of his foil, Lechmere, who is called "sturdy" and "honest" by Coyle via the narrator, and downright "manly" by Jane Wingrave, who has summoned him to Paramore as an example to her perverse nephew.

Todorov leaves some interpretive space for the absences and secrets in the short fiction of this period, but generally seems to feel that the secret's secret is

that it is a secret, pointing out that James "deploys all his forces to attain the hidden essence, to reveal the secret object... [yet] he constantly postpones, protects the revelation—until the story's end, if not beyond" (145). The manipulation of absence in England at this time, however, had a social and public 'presence,' and one that lodged in the public consciousness throughout the late Victorian/early Edwardian age. The Wilde trials, specifically, engendered a whole new journalistic discourse, in which the unnameable could be presented in such a way as to feed the public the information they so avidly desired while at the same time preserving their delicate sensibilities. In *Talk on the Wilde Side*, Ed Cohen itemizes some of the euphemistic adjectives of lack that permeate newspaper accounts of the trials: Wilde's behaviour is described variously as "'*im*moral,' '*im*modest,' '*un*natural,' '*im*proper,' '*in*decent,' '*un*respectable,' '*di*sreputable,' etc., in order to avoid having to specify positively the actual sexual acts named in Queensberry's defense." Journalists "portrayed Wilde's acts, and ultimately his "person," in terms of the overdetermined absence of those qualities that ideologically defined normative middle-class male behaviour (e.g., 'morality,' 'modesty,' 'nature,' 'propriety,' 'decency,' 'respectability,' etc.)" This practice of describing Wilde as embodying the lack of everything that the moral heteronormalized male represents came to have the general effect, as Cohen argues, of "indicat[ing] the presence of 'unnameable' sexual acts" (144).

The unnameable or absent, of course, is vastly more prone to overdetermination than is the nameable and present. The designation of 'moral' evokes the fairly narrow and stable image of a person living within the parameters

of a monogamous heterosexual procreative family unit. The term 'moral' is thus unlikely to be overdertermined, since its meaning is so specific and stable. We know exactly what Owen is not, what he has given up, or rejected. The attributes of lack or absence used in connection with Wilde, however, and metonymically with all sexual deviance—must be overdetermined, since there are many more ways in which to be immoral than to be moral, from double-parking to serial-killing. What Owen *is* isn't the problem; it is what was never guessed about him (his years-long contemplation of demurring from the military) and what cannot now be known about him (the true reasons for his refusal) that render him a threat to and a spy within the dominant culture. The original association of this vocabulary of lack and negation with Wilde, his perversion, and his trials, cements the connotation of this discourse as a (homo)sexual one.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is even more specific in her identification of the use of lack, absence, and negativizing language; in *The Epistemology of the Closet*, she suggests that this vocabulary is part of "the centuries-long historical chain of substantive uses of space-clearing negatives to void and at the same time to underline the possibility of male same-sex genitality" (202). She goes on to say that "the newly specifying, reifying medical and penal public discourse of the male homosexual role, in the years around the Wilde trials, far from retiring or obsolescing these preteritive names, seems instead to have packed them more firmly and distinctively with homosexual meaning" (203).

Owen himself is one of these 'cleared spaces'; for an eponymous character, he remains, like Melville's Bartleby, essentially unknown to the reader,

refusing to give up his meaning and suffering all indignities stoically and silently. The reader learns more about even the most peripheral characters than he does about Owen's inner life. Circumstantially and historically, he is situated as an absence and associated with the "unspeakable" at a time when that very lack could have only one signification. The view of the dominant culture as represented by the Wingraves is that Owen is 'inauthentic,' already a ghost.

This may help with another puzzling aspect of the story: its oddly abrupt ending. Virginia Woolf makes the point that such fully created characters lead the reader to expect a longer fiction than the one in which they appear:

> There they are on the spot with all the stir and importance that belong to living people... we seem to be settling in for a long absorbing narrative; and then, rudely, incongruously, a shriek rings out; poor Owen is found stretched on the threshold of the haunted room; the supernatural has cut the book in two... The catastrophe has not the right relations to what has gone before (51-2).

Woolf's point is valid; with the possible exception of Owen himself, the characters in this story are created with great depth and detail, and seem suitable as the foundation of a much longer narrative. But just as they begin circulating through the story, it ends without their having had the opportunity to do or say much of anything. And yet the truncated nature of the story makes sense structurally if we bear in mind Todorov's assertion that once the "essence" or secret of the story has been uncovered, the tale ends. We never discover incontrovertibly what the secret is in this case, but Todorov also points out that in

these stories James "constantly postpones, protects the revelation—until the story's end, if not *beyond*" (145, my emphasis). There is a stalemate at Paramore, and neither side is going to budge; the Wingraves are as vehement and vocal in their stance as Owen is convinced and tight-lipped in his. As soon as this impasse is identified as a stable and immovable state, there ceases to be a reason for the story to continue.

Technically, the story's ending is a happy one; Coyle, the protagonist, survives. His perverse trajectory has been both qualified and covert. There is no indication that he will go on to renounce the military, but he has come to accept conscientious objection as a valid moral stance. He has not to this point betrayed himself through word or deed as Owen has, however, and one additional difference in their situations has further served to preserve Coyle's status as a member of the dominant culture, the presence of that most irrefutable signifier of male heterosexuality: a wife. Owen lacks a corresponding satellite figure; in fact, Kate Julian exists as a reminder that Owen's refusal to enter into a homosocial life of professional aggression is linked to his refusal to make or act on a sexual choice. He will neither kill nor reproduce; he is inert, virtually dead already.

The method of Owen's actual death is reasonable in the circumstances. By the time he dies, James has already offered up the anecdote of the murderous Colonel Wingrave, who bludgeoned his son to death at Paramore "in the time of George the Second." Another maddening absence rests at the centre of this episode, however: what could possibly have transpired between an old soldier and his son that would provoke the father to murder him "in a fit of passion"? What

discovery about or disclosure from the son could result in the boy's total obliteration, or erasure? The Colonel has done literally what Owen's glowering grandfather has done linguistically. The parallel is uncanny, strictly speaking, but it has more to do with agency than with repetition: the murdering ghost represents or acts on behalf of the grandfather, while Owen's script is provided by the obliterated son. Whereas the dead son's possible disclosure has resulted in his murder, however, Owen's more prudent silence results in a merely figurative erasure through disowning.

His probable fate appears neither to surprise nor to intimidate Owen, who is clearly a fighter if not a soldier; he has already heeded the call to judgment by spending the previous night in the White Room, and his stay there seems to be responsible for his appearing to have aged when Coyle sees him the next day. What he saw or experienced at that time is yet another interpretable absence, though we assume it is the Colonel with a dire warning to heed his upbringing or pay the price. Certainly Owen shows no reluctance to face his accusers, though he allows that "it hasn't been easy for me—anything rather!" (573) when speaking to Coyle. And yet when he is first summoned to Jane Wingrave after his initial announcement, Coyle notices that Owen "is smiling again with the perverse high spirit in a wrong cause that he had shown in their recent interview" as he leaves "to face the ordeal" (565). At this point, however, he hasn't faced the ire of the Wingraves *en famille*; once relegated by them to the status of non-entity through disentitlement and discursive negation, Owen wearily tells Coyle, "I just want to go away—I don't care if I never come back again" (573).

And "go away" is exactly what he does. He allows the surly Kate Julian to lock him in the White Room in the full expectation that if the crime of his identity is a capital one, he will pay the price for it. The last sentence of the story reads, "He was all the young soldier on the gained field" (587). The *gained* field. This implies that he has died in the service of a greater victory, which in fact he has. In his willingness to have his mettle judged against that of any soldier, to submit to whatever penalty the dominant culture needs to exact from him as the price for an authentic identity, he has died honorably—he has 'won' his 'grave.'

Miles to Go:

Perversion Management through Assimilation in *The Turn of the Screw*

The introduction to *The Turn of the Screw* is characterized by a relentless and puzzling recurrence of the number two. This quantity is named again and again throughout the prologue and the beginning of the governess's narrative, even when another number or quantity would serve the narrative just as well. Some of these twos, such as the number of children at Bly and the number of ghosts who pursue them, are integral to the structure of the story. There is no inevitable reason, however, for the governess to have met the man in Harley Street *twice* before her hiring for the post at Bly, or for the children's having been orphaned *twice* before the owner of Bly inherits his responsibility for them. Enough of these twos are arbitrary that a theme seems to have been announced, though its significance at this early point is mysterious. Before it is clear that the unidentified initial speaker and Douglas will form a pair of narrators, the former ceding to the latter, the assembly of Christmas Eve visitors has been forced to wait two nights for the governess's manuscript to be delivered. We are told that if the involvement of a single child in a ghost story "gives the effect another turn of the screw," then the presence of a second child must give the screw two turns.

In his prologue, Douglas, the second narrator, speaks of the two children, the niece and nephew of a bachelor in Harley Street, who have come under his protection because of the death, two years earlier, of his brother, and more recently of his parents. The children have thus been twice orphaned, first by the deaths of their parents, and then by those of their grandparents. The nameless governess is now introduced as having

accepted the position at Bly in part at least because of her attraction to the children's uncle, though Douglas emphasizes that she has met him only twice, and will never see him again. By the time the governess actually begins her narrative, the two introductory narrators seem to have established a pair of concentric frames for her story. But their introductory remarks do not serve to frame the story that follows—neither ever reappears. Instead, they erect a double screen or barrier behind which the governess's story recedes from the end of the Victorian age, which is the prologue's present, to the age's beginning, the present of the governess's narrative. Geographically, the introduction also situates Bly within Essex, itself described in relation to the hub of London as a marginal space to which the children have been relegated. Essex lies northeast of London; the governess's home, Hampshire, is situated southwest of the city, at the opposite terminus of the same trajectory. By the time the governess speaks, the reader has already absorbed—on whatever level of consciousness—the concept of two in at least three ways: as a complementary pair (grandparents, parents, brother and sister); as repetition or recurrence (two nights' wait, the governess's two meetings with the owner of Bly); and as a binary or bipolar set that must remain relationally constant (the last and first years of the Victorian Age as poles of a temporal line, Hampshire and Essex as poles of a geographical line that bisects London, the provisional home of the master of Bly).

The governess immediately takes up the polar motif, describing the beginning of her experience at Bly "as a succession of flight and drops, a little see-saw of the right throbs and the wrong" (6). Her judgment of the house itself is that it is "half-displaced, half-utilized," and two days after her arrival, she meets Miles, an event that bestows on her a matched set of children. After the inaugural appearance of Miss Jessel (which takes

the children and by extension the estate in which they are housed. Simply by virtue of her having accepted these bizarre conditions, she transgresses the class and power boundaries that she has hitherto held in such reverence. Whereas Quint and Miss Jessel have effected their transgression literally and sexually, the governess inhabits a sterile, *de facto* version of that transgression in the very conditions of her employment. At once omnipotent and provisional in the world of the secluded Essex estate, she will spend the rest of her time at Bly simultaneously manifesting sexual presence and fending it off, creating it in order to banish it. Inhabiting this dual role, the governess cannot actually function as both aggressor and victim, however, and so those roles are assigned to others. The predatory sex-ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel appear as discrete entities to pose the threat, and the children are perfectly situated as the victims whose salvation must now depend on the governess's heroic intervention—an intervention that will surely be seen "in the right quarter." Even at this early stage in the governess's narrative she shows her refusal to acknowledge truths that are inconsistent with her drama; here, for instance, she fails to recognize that if the master of Bly were anything but indifferent to the children or their fate, they would already be living in Harley Street, obviating the need for a remote governess.

But this is her story, and she understands the events at Bly only through the writing of them, which means that some facts must be ignored and others interpreted in such a way as to support her heroic status in relation to the children. If she can physically act neither as aggressor nor as victim in her drama, she must find a comprehensive dynamic, one that will encompass and express all possible roles, and she finds that dynamic in the act of witnessing, of using the gaze to ascertain and understand the danger

she perceives at Bly. Her acts of looking are so penetrative as to be voyeuristic. Mark Spilka suggests that the governess "is chiefly prurient, that she possesses in supreme degree a prurient sensibility... She is sensitive to sex-ghosts, especially those who appear to children" (246). I would argue that her prurience, her compulsion to acquire and to obsess over sexual knowledge, is more than a result of the neurosis that might be expected in a Victorian girl from an oppressive country home who suddenly finds herself running a sizable domestic institution. The gaze is the one medium in which she can maintain all three of her roles, at once watching aggressively for the Quint and Jessel figures, vigilantly supervising the children as governess/protector, and being seen passively in her identification with the children, who are knowing and perhaps even willing victims of the apparitions. Her interactions with Quint are typical of a mutuality, with their lengthy, silent stare-downs. At these moments her horror is only partially the result of her seeing the apparition. She is just as riveted by being the object of his gaze, a gaze that she sees as sexualized and avid, but whose object remains, for her, the children rather than herself.

Her powers of observation are impressive, and when she writes the account of her time at Bly, there is little doubt that she is being as truthful as she knows how to be. But her narrative is in the past tense; she is writing not what she sees, but what she remembers having seen. In each of the manifestations of the ghosts that she chronicles so meticulously, she so heavily interprets the information that the reader must decode and then reconstitute each episode as it might really have happened. But the few remaining bits of raw, uninterpreted data in her reports complicate her version of events, and give hints of her identification with the revenants. The famous first appearance of Quint on the

tower, for example, contains an element that seems at first superfluous; the governess ends her long description of the encounter by writing: "I can see at this moment the way his hand, as he went, moved from one of the crenellations to the next." This detail may seem merely to attest to the reality of the vision, but an instant before, she has written: "I saw him as I see the letters I form on this page" (17). The governess is describing the movement of Quint's hand *at the very moment* that she is watching the movement of her own hand across the page.[3] The specific possibility here is that the governess has 'written' Quint, but Shoshanna Felman points out that the apparitions are *always* associated with books, reading, and writing. To "see letters" is to read; to read is to interpret: "In her pursuit of meaning... the governess's whole adventure turns out to be essentially a *reading-adventure*, a quest for the definitive, literal or proper meaning of words and of events (197).

At this point the governess is unaware of the full story of Quint and the former governess, but like any reader she fills in the gaps in the text with her own inferences. She has gleaned enough from Mrs. Grose to create him for herself. In a conversation with the housekeeper, the governess asks, apropos of nothing, "What was the lady who was here before?" Mrs. Grose offers that "[s]he was young and pretty—almost as young and almost as pretty, Miss, even as you." Referring to Bly's owner, the governess responds that "[h]e seems to like us young and pretty!" to which her companion replies, "Oh he *did*... it was the way he liked everyone!" (12). Though Mrs. Grose stumblingly attempts to cover her reference to Quint, the governess dwells on the point in her narrative, and

[3] The very act of writing on the part of the governess serves to de-emphasize the first-person point of view. By creating a written text in which she is the hero, she moves the reader's eyes out from behind her own, and positions the textual character of the governess in her written story as another third-person character, while the real governess acts as a sort of limited-omniscient narrator.

infers both the existence of the valet, or some one like him, and the hint that he was sexually voracious. This wisp of a mystery is all she needs to begin her fatal confabulation; she has detected an absence, and in her determination to plumb its depths she creates a scenario whose supernatural elements are given just enough corroboration by the suspected activities of the living Quint and Miss Jessel to allow her to begin piling inference upon inference. Referring to a conversation with Mrs. Grose, she reports confidently near the end of the story that "the chain of my logic was ever too strong for her" (69); what she has failed to realize, though, is that the conclusions she has reached throughout the tale have become progressively more outlandish, each of them having been based on a previous conclusion that was slightly less so.

While the objective events at Bly can be said to transpire on a horizontal line, the governess's narrative rises from the starting point of that line at a forty-five degree angle as each misinterpretation begets the next, in a sequence that deviates further and further from that horizontal reality. There are visual analogues of this divergence of trajectories in the spectral sightings themselves, as the governess reports the apparitions showing themselves "only across, as it were, and beyond—in strange places and on high places, the top of towers, the roof of houses, the outside of windows" (49) and expresses her fearful certainty that both the revenants and the children seek to decrease that divergence, to come closer and closer to a sort of unity. The uniting of the divergent narrative lines would, of course, leave the governess with only objective reality, depriving her of the heroic mission whose success would give her a personal, marital, and sexual identity. She has a great deal riding on her version of events, and though it grows progressively less

credible, she is understandably reluctant to abandon it, except in scattered lucid moments of self-interrogation.

Upon Quint's first appearance, the wholly supernatural explanation seems plausible. By the middle of the story, however, the governess has made announcements that can be seen as progressing from concern through alarmism to paranoia. She decides that the children's docile comportment is "policy and a fraud!" and that Quint and Miss Jessel seek to "ply them with that evil still, to keep up the work of demons" (48-9). The reader comes to believe that the danger to the children lies not with a resumption of the abuse to which they were subjected in the care of their previous companions, but rather in having been left in the charge of some one whose devotion to them is hopelessly confused with her desire for and identification with their uncle, and with her compulsion to view them as both victims of Quint and Miss Jessel and as their co-conspirators. It is a game of victims and police and perpetrators, and she must at once play all the roles—a consolidation that contrasts with D.A. Miller's observation that in Collins' *The Moonstone*, for instance, the role of detective and enforcer was diffused throughout an entire population or cast of characters. The governess has no dominant collective with whom to consult or act in solidarity; indeed, her task is the more challenging for its undertaking in isolation.

Quint's second appearance provides more evidence of a substitution of the dead valet for the living governess. She has entered the dining room in order to retrieve a pair of gloves left there earlier; upon finding them she realizes that Quint is staring in at her through the window. Aside from the shock of recognizing him, she is now convinced that she is not the target of the apparition, that he had "come for someone else" (19). She

bases this conclusion on her observation that Quint's gaze "quitted me for a moment during which I could still watch it, see it fix successively several other things" (20).

She has thus transferred the threat from herself to an unidentified but nearby victim, and again has failed to recognize that Quint's actions, as in the first manifestation, are a mirror of her own. In fact, a mirror may have been exactly the enabling fact of this scene. The governess is looking at the window, and in the "grey" light of the late afternoon, with the hallway illumination lighting her from the rear, she could not help but see a human face in the glass—her own—though indistinct because backlit. Facial details at this moment would have been negotiable. She has just entered the room looking for a pair of gloves—inevitably she has stopped just inside the door and surveyed the obvious surfaces for the desired items, *fixing successively several other things* in the course of locating the gloves. Certainly if there were some one else standing in the room with the governess—a ten year-old boy, for example—his presence would have been immediately ascertainable. There would have been no need to examine "several other things," as if the child could be mistaken for a letter-opener or a flower pot, or any object situated on the surface of a piece of furniture.

And so the governess proceeds to the exterior of the house in pursuit of the spectre, but finds no trace of it. Surveying the grounds, she is sure he is no longer in the vicinity; but her means of knowing is interesting: "He was there or was not there: not there if I didn't see him" (21). She means that his proximity would have set off some intuitive, psychic alarm within her, but in light of subsequent events she might as well have meant, "not there if I hadn't willed him there." She moves to the window, peering inside as Quint has done, and scaring Mrs. Grose as he has scared the governess. When

the shaken housekeeper joins her the governess asks, "Did I look very queer?" sounding almost hopeful, as if she had been attempting to actually inhabit the role of Quint. And moments later, she describes the apparition "as looking like an actor," whose very profession is based on the mobility of identities. Quint is indeed wearing clothing he stole from the estate's owner, clothing that constitutes a class transgression when worn by a "menial," the same transgression committed by a governess seeking to become the mistress of the house, or acting fraudulently as master of it. She seems to hint later that identity *is* performance, and perhaps that the act of writing is the creation of a reality, when she writes that with the declining season, Bly, "with its gray sky and withered garlands, its bared spaces and scattered dead leaves, was like a theatre after the performance—all strewn with crumpled playbills" (52). The simile is indicative of the way in which she perceives her experience at Bly: as spectacle, as a visual event of some duration, as a representation whose only meaning depends on the interpretation of its writer/witness.

If the governess is wholly or partially instrumental in the manifestation of Quint and Miss Jessel as vessels of substitution, however, the fact remains that, while the first appearance of the valet is connected with the psychic urgency of her erotic attraction to Bly's owner, this second occurrence seems linked to no correspondingly extreme mental state. She has simply stopped into the dining room to pick up a pair of gloves. But even in this mundane task there are associations that may account for Quint's presence. She has opened her account of this episode by remarking on the possible impropriety of mending a small tear or rent in one of the gloves while in the company of the children, thus introducing the idea of covering and revealing the body before witnesses. She then

characterizes the dining room oddly as a "temple of mahogany and brass," though it would seem more natural to use a secular metaphor—museum, even stateroom, given her penchant for nautical figures.

She is preparing to accompany the children to church, and may be in an ecclesiastical frame of mind, but her attendance at religious services is not without its problems. On this occasion, when she is picking up her mended gloves, it is first the rain and then her fear for the children's safety with Quint at large that keeps her home at Bly. On the second occasion, the day of Miles's revolt, she gets as far as the cemetery on the church grounds, but when the boy announces his intention to summon his uncle to Essex, she "only sat there on [her] tomb" (57). Miles proceeds into the church, but the governess, claiming reluctance to draw attention to her lateness, reports that she merely "walked round the church, hesitating, hovering" and finally stopping under a high window: "As I... listened to the sounds of worship, I was taken with an impulse that might master me, I felt, completely should I give it the least encouragement. I might easily put an end to my predicament by getting away altogether" (58).

The governess does not make the connection at that moment or later in her writing of it, but she has echoed the behaviour and situation of Quint, as he peers into the dining room window during his second appearance. She has of course immediately imitated him by going around to the outside of the window and scaring Mrs. Grose in the same manner, but at the moment outside the church she inhabits Quint again, finding herself unable to enter the building, hearing "the sounds of worship" from a liminal position, excluded and invisible, while those inside sing out their communal identity, their transparent, God-fearing legitimacy. And just as the governess finds no trace of Quint

when she reaches the exterior of the dining room window, neither will Mrs. Grose and the children find a trace of the governess when they exit the church.

The necessity of witnessing the dominant culture from the margins is shared by Quint and the governess. In life the valet was literally the master's agent, just as she is now. In death he wears the master's vest and is figuratively his agent, through a sartorial usurpation; her 'vest' is the authority she wields on the master's behalf. At this point it is tempting to introduce the governess's father, a clergyman, as part of the face in the dining room window, a face about which she writes, "It was as though I had been looking at him for years, and known him always" (20). The father is rendered mysterious through the single, cryptic allusion to him, but if James wants this tantalizing absence to be interpreted by the reader, he provides little guidance. That the father was "eccentric" is stated; the nature and manifestations of that eccentricity are left unspecified. What can be reasonably inferred is that he was a strict, patriarchal presence, and that a young daughter growing up in his household might take the phenomenon of agency as a given, since it is her father's role to represent God, the ultimate patriarch, in his official capacity. If she recognizes the face in the dining room window, it may be a result of a bleeding together of church, authority, power, and sex-panic in the mind of the governess. She looks at Quint, and recognizes her father, a face she "had been looking at... for years." Why she associates her father with the sexual threat that Quint represents is a matter of shakier speculation; whether it is simply Oedipal residue or the repressed return of memories of sexual abuse, she looks at the face of an ominous stranger and finds it horrifyingly familiar—more familiar than can be accounted for by her relationships with any man other than her father who is mentioned in the novella.

Late that night she suddenly tells Mrs. Grose: "He was looking for little Miles... *That's* whom he was looking for." When the housekeeper asks how she has come by this information, the younger woman says only, "I know, I know, I know!" (25). How can she know this? Only by sharing Quint's thinking and intentions. Why Miles, and not Flora? Of all the shadowy, unnameable activities that are attributed to Quint and Miss Jessel in relation to the children, a possible sexual interference with Miles perpetrated by Quint would be the most transgressive, the most unthinkable, because the dynamic is not only abusive—it also takes a same-sex trajectory. Again looms the spectrum on which perpetrator and victim are opposite poles, with the role of protector occupying the midpoint. The governess will not be able to stabilize herself on this scale, sliding to the left when recognizing the Quint-face perhaps as her father's or even as her own through family resemblance, and then sliding to the right when identifying with Miles as victim, and feeling terror on his behalf ("I know, I know, I know!"). This is a function of her triangulated and unresolvable roles as aggressor, victim, and intervener. And it becomes obvious that the ghosts act not independently but predictably, depending on the governess's frame of mind *before* each manifestation.

After Todorov, who identifies the presence of secrets and absences at the centre of James's short fiction of this period, it is clear that there is more than one motivating absence in *The Turn of the Screw*. Quint and Miss Jessel, certainly, have always existed on a plane of absence—first as a covering or erasure of knowledge, an 'opaquing' of transparency as they prey secretly on the children in hidden places, and then as ontological absences in death, affecting those around them without having an organic existence themselves, like the eye of a hurricane. The governess, lacking a stable identity,

exerts a correspondingly chaotic force on Mrs. Grose and the children. Miles and Flora, for their part, maintain an absolute silence regarding their recent past with the valet and his consort by censoring or even genuinely repressing those memories, and Miles and the governess work together in tacitly avoiding identification of the transgression that has precipitated the boy's expulsion from school.

With the dining room episode, Quint has now appeared twice; the reader has come to expect that the occurrence of that number will have some significance in this story, and this proves true. The more recent manifestation of the ghost has been at much closer quarters than was the first, and the governess has every reason to believe that the next may be even more invasive. The confrontation may in fact be so intimate that she will have to either physically grapple with the thing, or admit to herself at least that it is subjective and illusory, and that any threat to the children must lie elsewhere. Her mission of protection obviated, there would be nothing more heroic left to her than the role of schoolmarm and babysitter—hardly the kind of thing that would impress the oblivious master in Harley Street.

And so, after his second appearance, Quint goes away for a while. The governess, however, has browbeaten some scant details about her own predecessor from Mrs. Grose; Miss Jessel was "a lady," a tragic figure who had been led into perdition through weakness rather than evil. This sounds like a more docile apparition, one that might serve to contain a manageable psychic charge—a charge of regret and remorse rather than of murderous or sexual intent. The existence of such a revenant—who after all may have been in the process of becoming a mother herself at the time of her death—would allow the governess to be just as alarmed for and protective of the children, but with much less

likelihood of a confrontation that would lead to the exploding of the fantasy altogether. And this ghost should make its first appearance at a greater distance than Quint did on his debut, just in case her subsequent visits begin to plot an approach, as his did.

Soon, on one of the few occasions when the governess and Flora are alone at some remove, and without Miles, Miss Jessel in fact materializes for the first time. (Miles will be irrelevant to this sighting, since he has already be earmarked as Quint's target.) The governess is watching Flora with one eye, as it were, and working on her "stitching" with the other. While she sits, creating something coherent out of fragments with her needle and thread, something else comes into being on the other side of the lake. Without raising her eyes, the governess becomes more and more convinced of the presence of the apparition, though she struggles to contain her agitation, and finally she reports that "my heart stood still with the wonder and terror of the question of whether [Flora] too would see" (30). The 'too,' of course, is erroneous; the governess has by her own account seen nothing.

When she looks over at Flora, the little girl is playing with two pieces of wood, "markedly and intently" trying to fit the more slender piece into a hole in the flat piece. One doesn't require Freud to call this a doubly tragic image of the little girl, who can be seen as compulsively reenacting her abuse by Quint and Miss Jessel, the way a child who is beaten may abuse a doll. But the governess, instead of interrupting the girl by joining her or gently questioning her about her activity, interprets Flora's intensity as a covering up, a denial of knowledge that the governess is now convinced the child has.

By this time, however, both children must be fully capable of recognizing the symptoms when the governess is about to enter one of her fugue states. By her own

description, she shrieks, grips, grasps, bellows, and howls during these episodes, and throughout her narrative offers several variations of the comment she makes when reporting this sighting to Mrs. Grose: "I was conscious as I spoke that I looked prodigious things, for I got the slow reflection of them in my companion's face" (31). (She invokes these images as further proofs of the veracity of her drama, but of course all they prove is that *she* believes what she is writing.) Nothing could be more natural than that the children, whatever emotional damage they have previously incurred, would seek to disengage themselves as much as possible from yet another of these unstable, threatening adults when the governess's characteristic seizures appear imminent. If Flora looks "intent," she can certainly be forgiven for wanting to be left alone while seeing the governess become more and more aroused over her sewing. Her studious avoidance is a measure of self-defense, in the way that another child might shut her eyes tightly to become invisible.

Flora's project (which recalls the title of the novella and gives it an implicitly sexual connotation) also explains why Miss Jessel appears when she does. The external circumstances are right: the governess and the child are alone and in relative isolation. While the governess is sitting on the bench with her sewing, she has certainly looked up periodically as Flora has begun her construction of the boat. The governess's witnessing of Flora's "intent" copulative gestures with the pieces of wood causes her own sex panic to surface. Her sewing forgotten, she begins to stitch together a ghost that will serve as a receptacle for her terror, the ghost of a figure who crossed class lines (whether up or down is irrelevant to the transgression) and engaged in sexual activity. The latter's

disgrace and expulsion from the Eden of Bly as a result of that indulgence is reassurance and proof to the governess of her own righteousness.

The governess seeks out Mrs. Grose after the manifestation at the lake, and describes the figure to her. As with Quint, this ghost is apparently not interested in the governess herself: "She never gave me a glance." And why should she? The governess is the originator—not the object—of the spectral gaze. The ghost is interested only in the child, at whom she stares "with such awful eyes... [w]ith a determination—indescribable. With a kind of fury of intention." At the housekeeper's further prodding, she offers that the figure looked "rather poor, almost shabby" and yet "wonderfully handsome—very, very" (32). If this tableau looks familiar, it is because she is describing the scene the reader has just witnessed, as the "handsome" governess, her face distorted into a rictus of insane concentration, stares "with a fury of intention" at Flora working on her boat—and with the same goal in mind of "getting hold" of the child, though ostensibly to save her from whatever the Jessel figure may have in mind. It is an underscoring irony that the governess reports during this interview that Mrs. Grose looks at her as if the manic eyes of the revenant were in fact hers. The housekeeper is beginning to realize that the only beings at Bly who relentlessly "fix" people in their gaze are Quint, the governess, and now Miss Jessel. The reader's suspicions are aroused here because the governess has described the episode only after the fact, ending her narrative report at the lake just as she was about to look up at whatever had materialized there. This omission is necessary to the narrative; if the governess had described the apparition as she saw it at the time, immediately after her intense staring at Flora, both the figure and the attitude of the ghost would have been seen as so identical to the governess's that the necessary ambiguity of

the text would have collapsed. If the governess wants to 'get hold' of Flora in order to protect her, then she must have an idea of a correspondingly urgent reason for Miss Jessel's interest in the child. She may of course wish to continue the same homodynamic abuse on Flora that Quint has perpetrated on Miles, but more tragically in the mind of the governess, Miss Jessel may want Flora to substitute for the child she was destined to have by Quint, thus completing their unnatural version of a family: Quint in the master's clothes, and Miss Jessel the mother of his child. The arrangement would parody the kind of family who might be installed at Bly were there a master actually in residence. There is not, however, and the governess is horrified by the presumption of these ghosts who would use the master's legal wards to complete their ghastly domestic structure.

Some days now pass, in the course of which the governess's alarm subsides slightly, though her vigilance never flags. Then one night when she has become engrossed in Fielding's *Amelia*, the story of a young woman's guarding of her own innocence—and which Leon Edel reminds us contains the words 'rape' and 'adultery' on the first page—she feels a certain restless need to get up and wander. On the grand staircase she finds Quint—now inside the house for the first time. She will later refer to the staircase as the place where "Quint had so hungrily hovered for [Miles]" (46), failing at least consciously to entertain the thought that if Quint were actually mounting the stairs to Bly's bedrooms, he might have been seeking entry not at Miles's room, but at the room across the hall, the governess's. It is also likely that the boy is at that moment outside on the lawn, since the governess returns to find Flora observing something at the window. Miles isn't identified on this occasion, but eleven nights later Flora is found at the window again, and this time the governess does see the boy outside. Quint's usual

element is the exterior of the house, the staircase sighting being his sole interior manifestation. It speaks poorly of Quint's ability as a hunter if, on the occasion that the boy is outside on Quint's territory, the dead valet would choose to appear indoors for the first and only time. It would seem that the boy is not his only target, and that the governess is mistaken, consciously at least, as to the true scope of Quint's interests—or her own. (Remember Mrs. Grose's assertion that Quint was "too free with everyone!")

This sighting is identical in tone to Quint's first appearance, on the tower. And it is congruent with Mark Spilka's interior/exterior view of the Victorian domestic household:

> Evil existed outside the home, and children had to be preserved from it by feminine example and paternal sternness. And evil, in the Victorian age, tended to be largely identified with sex: the home might tolerate commercial hardness and impiety in the world outside, but it could not accommodate sexual license (250).

Outside on the grounds of Bly, Quint first appears at the highest elevation possible, at the top of the tower, forcing the governess to gaze up at him; inside, the relative positions are reversed, and the governess has the superior place, implying what she subsequently confirms, that in any intercourse between them, she is not the victim: "I had plenty of anguish after that extraordinary moment, but I had, thank God, no terror. And he knew I had not—I found myself at the end of an instant magnificently aware of this" (41). There ensues the mutually penetrating "fixing" of the gaze, and the governess records that "it *was* human, as human as to have met alone, in the small hours, in a sleeping house, some enemy, some adventurer, some criminal." Feeling such intimacy with him there on the stairs at the end of the night, she seems to see herself through the eyes of the ghost: "...it

would have taken but little more to make me doubt if even *I* were in life" (41). At this moment the governess has slid to the victim end of the spectrum; Miles is 'safely' out of doors while Quint is inside; she has substituted for the sexual victim, and she has called upon her other roles, those of "feminine example and paternal sternness," of governess and master, to "preserve" the children from the evil of the ghost on the staircase.

The staircase is used as a locus of substitution for the two ghosts and the governess. After seeing Quint, she invites the reader to "imagine the general complexion, from that moment, of my nights. I repeatedly sat up till I didn't know when" (43). It is likely that she is continuing to avail herself in these hours of the master's library of relatively salacious adult classics, whose various reputations she had heard of, but not a volume of which had ever "reached my sequestered home and appealed to the unavowed curiosity of my youth" (40). Presumably her curiosity is now in the process of being satisfied, even if the urges generated by that process are not. During this time of late-night reading she sees Miss Jessel again, seated on the lower step of the staircase "in an attitude of woe" (43). The dead governess now seems a cautionary figure, urging purity on young women who wish to retain their position in society, which for women is life itself.

A month later, on the day she flees the churchyard determined to leave Bly forever, she feels overcome with "difficulties and obstacles," sinks down onto the lower step of the staircase, and then remembers that "it was exactly where... in the darkness of night and just so bowed with evil things, I had seen the spectre of the most horrible of women" (59). The staircase, bisected into two levels by a landing, is the only location in which Quint, the governess, and Miss Jessel have all been present. Quint has appeared

"halfway up," while Miss Jessel was at the bottom in "an attitude of woe." The same sexual dalliance that relegated the dead governess to the lower end of the social hierarchy had the effect of raising Quint, the "base menial," to a higher position on the same scale. The governess conflates the evils of sex and class transgression and realizes that her quest for the master in Harley Street is futile. She has been luckier than Miss Jessel, in that she is at least not exiled in the disgrace of pregnancy, or like Quint, whose body is found "at the bottom of a steepish, icy slope, a wrong path altogether" (28), but as she rises from the step wearily and goes "the rest of the way up," it is clear to her that governesses violate class boundaries at their peril.

She is at this point exhausted, her psychic resources at an ebb; when she opens the door to the schoolroom, Miss Jessel is of course there, seated at the governess's desk resting her head in her hands "with evident weariness." With "an indescribable grand melancholy of indifference and detachment" (59), the apparition rises and vanishes. The Jessel apparition has never been what could be called animated or malevolent in the way Quint has been, but this appearance in particular emphasizes her dejection and defeat, as if to mirror the governess's own mood in the face of her "obstacles and difficulties." The living governess does not tell us whether she takes the ghost's apparent misery as a commiseration or a mockery, but the result is that she decides suddenly to stay at Bly.

The final appearance of the female revenant reveals two facts that render the story's ending inevitable. First, the reader's suspicion that the ghosts are a subjective phenomenon emanating from the governess is verified; the magnitude and manifest sincerity of Flora's outburst especially imply the truthfulness of her claim never to have seen the ghosts that have caused the governess's behaviour to become erratic, then

obsessive, and ultimately violent. Even Mrs. Grose, whose support of the governess has been, it seems to me, inordinate, reluctantly admits that she sees nothing when the young woman restrains her physically, "quite thrusting her...and presenting her" (72) to the Jessel figure. Second, this (non)sighting shows that Miss Jessel has reverted to the location and attitude of her first appearance, indicating that the need for her passive, remorseful psychic charge is passing. The living governess, newly convicted of her sanity and of her mission, is re-energized, and will work from now on through the more dynamic and predatory Quint figure. With the hysterical exit of Flora in the company of Mrs. Grose, the governess is left unmolested to work her exorcism on the boy[4].

The scene of Miles's death is the same dining room "temple" outside of which Quint appeared for the second time. The governess waits there for the boy, steeling herself in the knowledge that "what I had to deal with was, revoltingly, against nature" (80). Miles arrives, and the strained conversation that ensues between the two makes her think "whimsically" that they are like a honeymoon couple who "feel shy in the presence of the waiter" (81). The governess's use of the phrase "against nature" in proximity with the adjective "whimsical"—which she uses only once elsewhere, to describe the "bent" of her father[5]—indicates that her characterization of her and the boy as a newlywed couple, whose chief pastime may be expected to be sexual intercourse, is neither casual nor "whimsical."

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[4] The housekeeper and Flora are gone from the narrative, but perhaps not from Bly. The governess never actually sees the pair leave the estate; she hears a report of it from a servant. Later, Miles will ask why the governess had not taken steps before Flora "became too ill to travel" (81), indicating that his information is that she is still somewhere in the house—intelligence he may have gleaned from an overheard conversation among servants. Mrs. Grose, following the incident at the lake, may have decided to take Flora under her own protection while waiting for the master to respond to a summons she herself has sent through the bailiff, her usual scribe.

[5] In the original *Collier's* serialization, the father is described as having "eccentric habits"; in the Heinemann edition of the same year, he has "an eccentric nature" (94).

She proceeds to interrogate Miles as to the nature of his transgression at school, urging him to surrender to her, to disclose, or as she has put it to Mrs. Grose, to "confess. If he confesses, he's saved" (79). But saved how? She seems to have conflated Miles's transgression at school and his sexual transgression with Quint. Will his confession help to restore his innocence in either or both aspects, in effect revirginalizing him sexually and in the eyes of the dominant culture, in this instance represented by the institution of the boarding school? In her narrative she never interrogates her heavy-handed obsession with vicarious knowledge of the children's sexual experience; she assumes the reader will share her view that that knowledge must be brought to light, regardless of the consequences.

Miles wants desperately to get away from her, and begins to babble like a hostage, promising anything if only he can buy himself time to escape: "I mean, I'll tell you anything you like. You'll stay on with me, and we shall both be all right, and I *will* tell you—I *will*. But not now" (84). Under duress, he admits that his expulsion from school was the result of his suggestion that other boys should tell their parents in letters whatever it is that he had been telling his fellow students in person, presumably some narrative version of his abuse at the hands of Quint and/or Miss Jessel, or tidbits of the sexual knowledge he now possesses as a result of that abuse. The governess's reactive spasm of compassion manifests itself as the predatory leap of a carnivore on its prey: "that moment made *me*, with a single bound and an irrepressible cry, spring straight upon him" (87). As she leaps up and forward, her face rises into the frame of the reflective surface of the window, in which she sees Quint for the last time, "a white face of damnation." She reports that "the wildness of my leap served only as a great betrayal"

(88), thereby making her own confession that her mental crises always precipitate these ghostly appearances, but also acknowledging on an unconscious level that the "betrayal" here is the realization that the "white face of damnation" she sees in the window is in fact her own twisted visage, the family resemblance to that of her father perhaps accentuated by the extreme expression she assumes.

She begins to shriek in the usual way, and Miles, having obviously managed to speak to his sister before her isolation, assumes that his captor is seeing the Jessel figure. At her insane denial of that, he guesses again: "It's *he*?" He begins to look frantically around the room, but like his sister, sees nothing. The governess, having reached a sort of ecstasy of physical possession of the boy, cries out triumphantly, "I have you...but he has lost you forever!" (88) But she is speaking to herself; the climax of the story is the climax of her drama: her recognition of herself as Quint allows her to assimilate him rather than to simply substitute for him. But her epiphany can only be complete if she also assimilates the victim role in the person of little Miles. She can do this only gesturally, and she physically presses him to her with such force that he expires through suffocation, crushing, or sheer fright. Having expunged both the predator and the victim through assimilation, she can now assume the role she was originally meant to inhabit—the only role that remains, that of governess—though in achieving that goal she has left herself with no one to govern.

The Turn of the Screw is not just the story of an insane governess acting out her psychosis on a pair of children who have been prepared for the dangerous behaviour of adults by their own past, though the horror of it resides in their victimization and in the ghastly dramatic irony of the governess's narrative. The governess, exactly because of

her insanity, is the heroine of the tale: arriving at Bly young, unstable, and yearning to prove her 'mastery,' she persists through the agony of a series of events in which she truly believes. She literally faces her demons and in the end vanquishes them and frees herself from their crippling influence. The tragedy is that, in her linking of her quest of self-constitution with the circumstantial and confabulated mission of saving the children from ghosts, she harms one and kills the other.

If the enabling context of the tale is the highly dichotomized binary of the Victorian cult of childhood sexual innocence in contrast to the actual experience of children in that domestic space, then the entire story can be seen to pivot, as the introduction so insistently proves, on a preponderance of twos. The governess, most obviously, requires two sets of discrete entities to contain the psychic effluvium of her conflicting roles: Quint and Jessel for the danger represented by a master's sexual aggression, and the children—already experienced victims—for the sexual vulnerability of the Victorian governess.

Two as recurrence is simply everywhere in the story, within the Essex tale as the second victimization of the young siblings with the arrival of a second governess, and in structural details like the second appearance of Quint that foreshadows the tale's climax in his second appearance at the dining room window, the two failed attempts to enter the church, and the two manifestations on the staircase. Outside the governess's narrative but within the novella, the twin barriers of distance and credibility provided by the introductory narrators can be seen in retrospect also as devices of delay; they prevent the reader from identifying the governess as insane until she has had enough narrative space in which to indict herself. The doubleness of the binary of stable relations is present

foremost in the controlling metaphor of the title: the force of the turning impetus being magnified at a constant, 'exaggerated' level at the point of its effect. And the relationally stable binary of class position in the story is paramount: governesses court disaster either in lowering themselves to the caresses of "base menials" or in aspiring to the legitimizing bedrooms of the gentry.

Ultimately, the concept of two acts as a suspension of resolution into one; while the governess struggles with the externalized horrors of Quint and Miss Jessel, her battles are always on two fronts: the elimination of the demons, and the complete, purifying investigation of the children, a sort of Foucauldian cleansing through confession. Her courageous persistence results in her own birthing into a single, unified self, but in removing the threat to the children, she removes the children themselves. At the story's end, she is whole but alone, having sacrificed Miles in the "temple" of her integration. The resolution or unity of pairs held in polar suspension until now has had an unforeseen effect. Though the perversion represented by Quint as perpetrator and Miles as victim has been eradicated, so has the only role she legitimately inhabits: the role of governess. In her supreme achievement lies her ultimate failure. She finishes without property, and without the prospect of marriage—she has even denied herself the problematic status of governess. And, in just the way she arrived at Bly, she leaves without a name.

The Man of his Dreams:

Perversion Management through Denial in "The Jolly Corner"

Sixteen years after "Owen Wingrave," James was still working through the problem of perversion management. Like the reluctant soldier of the earlier tale, Spencer Brydon is a willingly marginalized figure who is being goaded by a persistent and powerful woman to rejoin the dominant culture of heteronormative relations and self-perception. And like Owen, Brydon reacts in the only way open to him—he attempts to kill or purge the perversion that prevents this reassimilation into the mainstream. Elements of *The Turn of the Screw* also appear in "The Jolly Corner." Like the governess whose plan is to win a legitimized matrimonial identity within the Victorian landed gentry, Brydon attempts his own legitimizing by qualifying as an exemplar of the twentieth-century American male. Both the governess and Brydon create spectral challenges that must be vanquished as a proof that they have earned their entry into these dominant cultures. She must face and triumph over the sex-ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel; he must face and come to terms with the self he might have been—the hulking American self who, by virtue its hyper-masculinity, has already earned the privilege that Brydon now seeks.

There are significant differences in their respective quests, however; the governess's yearning for an identity forces her to attempt a class transgression. She fails, and in her hubris kills her young pupil, the safeguarding of whom was the chief function of her own uncertain class. One of the lessons of *The Turn of the Screw* is that the class limbo in which governesses existed, with its appearance of gentility and its basis in

servitude, was fraught with danger for the young women who inhabited it. For Spencer Brydon, entry into the culture of the new American manhood is not—or should not be—a class transgression; that role is the very destiny into which he was born, and from which he fled thirty-three years before the tale begins.

The quests of Brydon and the governess also share a fatal dynamic with the story of Owen Wingrave: in all three tales, perversion is dealt with through erasure. For Brydon, the perverse part of the actual, current self must be excised and replaced with the sexually normalized American self that lurks at the jolly corner. The governess, in her desire to protect Miles, kills him, and along with him the inappropriate and precocious same-sex knowledge he has presumably acquired from Quint. Owen Wingrave, unable or unwilling to externalize, compartmentalize, or otherwise deny the ontological status of his sexual perversion, submits to a fatal confrontation that kills the self in its entirety.

Compartmentalization is exactly the strategy that Brydon uses, and with good reason. Upon leaving America for Europe three decades earlier he effected a sexual discontinuity that was accompanied by no corresponding rupture in the career of his ego. He escaped a heterocompulsory environment that was alien to him and sought one in which his sexual experience, knowledge, and behaviour were compatible with his innate impulses; ego and libido were able to exist in congruence. In retrospect, it is natural that he should look on his first twenty-three years as a successful compartmentalization of the libido; thus if the reason were compelling enough, why should it not be possible to re-isolate that psychic agency, only this time in order to kill it off or to replace it with one that is congruent with the ideal of the modern American male? The plan is naïve, at once hare-brained and tragic, analogous to a man's attempting a secret sex reassignment by

amputating his own penis. But if options for members of a sexual minority are always limited, they were at one time virtually non-existent. In the carriage trade in the time and place of "The Jolly Corner," acceptability was predicated not just on financial legitimacy, but also on behavioural conformity.

In her story, the governess is forced to act in conspicuous isolation; Owen Wingrave has a secret ally in Spencer Coyle. Brydon has Alice Staverton, who is unlike the women in either of the other two tales. Discreet and supportive, Alice is possessed of an almost unbelievable patience with Brydon—though the latter quality serves her agenda, which is to win him back to America, specifically to the resumption of their relationship, which was interrupted by his emigration to Europe decades earlier.

Briefly, the fifty-six year old Spencer Brydon has recently returned to New York City, where he was born and raised, after a thirty-three year sojourn in Europe. He renews a youthful relationship with Alice Staverton, a woman now of a certain age, in the company of whom he attempts to reintegrate himself into the fabric of the city he left so many years ago. Due to the death of the last member of his immediate family, he owns two properties in the city, one of which he has turned over to contractors for conversion to apartments, and the other is his childhood home, an even more desirable property, situated on a corner some blocks east of the former.

His unexpectedly competent dealings with the business involved in the conversion of the first property prompt him to begin wondering what kind of man he might have grown into had he remained in the United States during the previous three decades. Subtly encouraged by Alice in the entertaining of this fantasy, he begins to haunt the corner house in search of the entity he becomes more and more convinced lurks there: the

American man he could have been. Incredibly, he finds that man, and their meeting, while revelatory—even life-changing—for Brydon, is also devastating to him. He loses consciousness and subsequently comes to his senses with Alice cradling his head in her lap, and promising to "keep" him (579).

If Alice is less villainous than the intransigent Jane Wingrave, then Brydon is less heroic than Owen. The younger man created his own exile on principle, and without regard for the monetary loss his consequent disentitlement represented. Brydon is more pragmatic; his greater age may be responsible for his willingness to compromise and accommodate. His exile has been physical; he fled to Europe at the age of twenty-three to avoid American expectations of him, and he returns specifically to ensure that there will be no interruption in the flow of the inherited income that has supported his continental life in the intervening years. Specifically, he is to supervise renovations to his New York properties, renovations that will render those properties current and viable, foreshadowing the improvements in himself that he comes to believe are possible. These changes made, he will be qualified to live in the corner house, or in one like it, and to resume his place in New York society.

The title of "The Jolly Corner" packs a heavy semantic charge; the connotative, affective adjective at first seems unlikely in connection with its noun, and the reader might almost expect the story to be a child's narrative, or one in which a child is the protagonist. The word 'jolly,' though in perennial usage in the United Kingdom as a mild intensifier, has an infantile ring to the North American ear. The reader discovers that the corner in question is in fact the metonymic naming of a house that sits on a corner property in New York City, and the adjective proves anachronistic: the house on the

corner property is conceived of as jolly only in retrospect, as the middle-aged Spencer Brydon looks into the past and cherishes a presexual childhood he now considers to have lived literally in a safe, sheltering place, a *locus amoenus*, which at the time he would have experienced only as the earliest part of his life, without comparative judgments as to the relative jollity or onerousness of his circumstances. Only in light of his subsequent experience does he attach the childlike simplicity of 'jolly' to a dwelling that—even full of people and furniture—would still have had the grandiose, labyrinthine, and vaguely institutional contours of townhouses of the mid-nineteenth century.

The image of a corner is itself double; before we discover that the word refers to a house on an urban building plot, the idea of a corner contains its own reversal: there is the exterior of a convex corner, which must be gotten around, and the interior of a concave corner, with its attendant associations of a childhood punishment, or of being trapped, of 'painting oneself into a corner.' In the course of the story, the verbal sense of the word comes into play, as Brydon first corners his foresworn American self, and in turn is cornered by it. (If the reader interprets the story's ending as a happy one, then this cornering has indeed been 'jolly.') Even the jargon form of the word is relevant in connection with the New York into which Brydon feels he should reintegrate himself; to 'corner the market' is to own or control such a vast supply of a commodity that its price and availability are functionally dictated by a single individual or corporation. Cornering, in the New York to which Brydon returns, can make a sow's ear into a silk purse; it is the passport to a social position formerly attainable only by lineage and inherited wealth.

Brydon's use of the combined terms in the story's title, however, constitutes an indulgence, the romanticizing of a past that ended at the age of twenty-three, and which

near its end entailed the intense pressure of a nascent heterosexual relationship with Alice. His childhood, however, has taken on the sheen of the ideal while Brydon lived a different kind of life in Europe—a place he names in quotation marks, as though reluctant to associate himself with specific cities or events. Indeed, "Europe" in this sense evokes location less than it does license, scandal, and rumor. Both America the word and America the place are hostile to the insinuating evasiveness of quotation marks, however, and upon his return Brydon must come clean. He must reconcile his present self with his interrupted past, and with the European self that is so inconsistent with American manhood in the twentieth century.

His task is complicated by the fact that his European identity is actually rooted in his American origins, symbolized in the formal vestibule of the house on the jolly corner by the "large, black-and-white squares that he remembered as the admiration of his childhood and that had made in him... for the growth of an early conception of style" (565). The tiles, in their repetitive, contrasting configuration, were a text for the young Brydon, a code that he was able to decipher while others walked obliviously over it. The custom of the checkerboard floor in an entry hall was, ironically, an imitation of the European tradition: the contrasting squares, as they receded from the eye, emphasized by perspective the enormous dimensions of an imposing formal space. In its New World incarnation the practice served mostly as an allusion to that grandeur rather than as an embodiment of it, but the image was a promise of grander things in a previous time and a more civilized place, and for a child who has contemplated the juxtaposition of black against white in such regular, aesthetic repetition, it is more than possible that contrast—

if it were only radical and deliberate enough—could constitute a unity, an identity: black defined by its difference from white, and white by the inverse relation.

The story's opening introduces this idea of identity as differentiation, as Brydon remarks to a then-unnamed interlocutor that "[e]very one asks me what I 'think' of everything...and I make answer as I can—begging or dodging the question, putting them off with any nonsense" (553). Brydon considers the question too trivial to be answered seriously, and too profound to be dispatched casually. He presents himself, accurately it turns out, as the product of a different environment from the one into which he was born; he escaped from that originary place as certain aspects of the role he was expected to inhabit there proved untenable. He had "too promptly waked up to a sense of the ugly" (554) and fled to the more anonymous and transient climes of "Europe," trying to situate the self and the environment in a sort of cognitive congruence that he accurately foresaw as impossible in New York.

Whatever the degree of his success in that endeavor, it was sufficient to keep him away from the United States for more than three decades. His life in Europe is mentioned preteritively, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions based on a few tantalizing hints: "I believe I'm thought in a hundred quarters to have been barely decent," he remarks of the American opinion of his European career, and then admits, "I was leading, at any time these thirty years, a selfish frivolous scandalous life" (562). Unless Brydon has arrived at this latter opinion during the trans-Atlantic crossing, his self-deprecation is probably not entirely sincere. For one thing, he seems to have little faith in American susceptibility to the sublime; he characterizes the repeated overtures of developers

interested in the corner property as "the iteration of people who couldn't for their life understand a man's liability to decent feelings" (559).

These are the very people, however, whom he has returned to America to negotiate with, and Brydon's sensitivity and dismissiveness may result from the fact that his European life has been funded by the rental income from the two properties in question. Just as his "birth into style" is American in origin, so is the revenue that has permitted his distancing from that origin. It is in fact the management of that income that has brought him back to New York, and his unexpected competence in the necessary business dealings with agents and contractors that has caused Brydon's present identity crisis. He begins to wonder if his expatriation all those years ago might have been hasty, if he might actually have found it within himself to inhabit the role whose prospect was so intimidating that he has reconstructed the memory of his emigration as a rejection of that role, rather than as a flight from it.

Now he has second thoughts: "He found all things come back to the question of what he personally might have been, how he might have led his life and "turned out," if he had not so, at the outset, given it up" (561). The escape of three decades earlier is now being reconceived as a sacrifice; the freedom of living authentically in Europe has been paid for by 'giving up' what he sees American men enjoying: capital-based power. At the age of twenty-three Brydon withdrew himself from candidacy in the American hegemony, and he is seduced at fifty-six by the possibility that that act may have been premature. Thus certain elements of the story are foregrounded: the nature and function of spaces as private/domestic or public/competitive, and the linking of America with capitalist enterprise and masculine performance in opposition to the inheritance-based

wealth and gender complexity associated here with Europe-in-quotation-marks. The United States that Brydon left over three decades ago has more than fulfilled the destiny he foresaw with such alarm: the pace, violence ("concussions,") and architectural giantism that are now epidemic in the city are injurious reminders to him, recalling the personal inadequacies he suspected as a twenty-three year-old: the inability to function publicly in a Symbolic-based bureaucracy, to generate a self-sustaining income in competition with other males, and to perform satisfactorily in a heterosexual relationship. This latter inadequacy is especially grave since the health of the bureaucratic economic system is predicated on the office worker being able to leave the public arena of the skyscraper at the end of the day, and to come home to a private, nurturing family space over which he is the final authority—however menial his bureaucratic position might be. Public/private complementarity in this sense provided a balance that was put in constant tension by the nature of bureaucratic operation.

The New York that Brydon left as a young man in 1875 (assuming 1908 as the story's present) was a very different place from the metropolis to which he has returned thirty-three years later. The city had since its founding been a commercial centre, certainly, but the skyline of the first decade of this century was much farther from sea level than the one Brydon would last have seen. In his absence, the development of steel-beam framing and fast, safe passenger elevators had allowed towers of thirty and forty storeys to rise on sites where buildings a third of that height would have huddled when Brydon left the continent. The scale of the city now astounds him; he admits at the outset that he was absolutely unprepared for "the differences, the newnesses, the queernesses, above all the bignesses" (554) that awaited him on his return to the U.S. That 'bigness'

would have been emblematized for him not first by the astounding heights achieved by the new skyscrapers that housed the vast bureaucracies of capitalist enterprise, but rather by a single overwhelming sight that greeted entrants to New York Harbour after 28 October 1886: the Statue of Liberty. This massive structure, 93 metres tall, would have towered over Brydon's arrival, where only the lowly Fort Wood, a squat military bunker, had stood since the War of 1812 and throughout Brydon's New York childhood. Emma Lazarus, whose famous dedicatory poem, "The New Colossus," is displayed on the pedestal, identifies the monument as "[the] Mother of Exiles." The massive mother is a literal threshold figure, and Brydon refers to himself explicitly as an exile upon his return, in an exchange with Alice Staverton that evokes not only his expatriation but also the tension of the past's effect on the present: "'And don't you see how, without my exile, I shouldn't have been waiting till now--?' But he pulled up for the strange pang" (563).

The "strange pang" may be one of nostalgia or of regret; in connection to his interrupted relationship with Alice, perhaps it is guilt. But the first two of the story's three parts are overwhelmingly framed in the past conditional tense, the mood of foresworn choices and opportunities: if I had been or done *this*, I could have been or done *that*. Brydon's growing obsession is not simply a retrospective examination of the road not taken, however; he is like a middle-aged man who sits down at a piano for the first time to discover that he can acquit himself adequately at "Chopsticks" and then agonizes over the loss of his career as a concert virtuoso. The conclusion simply does not follow from the premise. The local catalyst for his search for an American self may have been his surprising willingness and ability "to climb ladders, to walk the plank, to handle materials and look wise about them, to ask questions, in fine, and challenge explanations"

(556), but this is really a performance in foreman's drag, the unmanly American boy overlaid with the mature European aesthete, 'looking wise' but in all likelihood being merely tolerated, commanding as much respect as the right of ownership secures him, and no more. Brydon's drag is not the Butlerian gender performance of functions and attitudes that actually constitutes perceived masculinity or femininity. It is closer to Bersani's sense of literal drag, with its "elements of longing and veneration" (48). Brydon really wants to be what he is impersonating, and experiences a *frisson* of belonging among the Others with their tools and their blueprints.

This taste of a possible American self has occurred in the less desirable of the two properties, "the mere number in its long row," (555) a private dwelling that is in the process of becoming semi-public in its conversion to apartments. It sits in the middle of the private/public spectrum, with the jolly corner house at the former end and the giant new business towers at the latter. There is another relevant space in the city, one that links the private with the past; this is Alice Staverton's house, a sort of embassy of the 1860s, which Brydon describes as a sensual and organic haven among the "dreadful multiplied numberings" that constitute his idea of the New York of the present, "some vast ledger-page, overgrown, fantastic, of ruled and criss-crossed lines and figures" (556). Alice's house is "a small still scene where items and shades, all delicate things, kept the sharpness of the notes of a high voice perfectly trained, and where economy hung about like the scent of a garden" (556).

Brydon values Alice's home for the qualities it lacks: outlandish scale, coarseness, haste, and the ostentatious display of money—all the characteristics of the public, architectural spaces of the city that he indicts. Alice's home is a marginal space in

the 'new' New York, a shelter from "all the public concussions and ordeals" that constitute life in the city. She has maintained it as though waiting for Brydon's return, and it shines for him all the more in contrast to the image of the "vast ledger-page" that neatly conflates the practice of accounting (New York's obsession with the bottom line), uniformity (the regimented appearance and behaviour of the new American man), and the public—that is, bureaucratic—control of domestic space (the dreary regularity of urban row housing). Brydon's simile of the ledger-page is a disavowing, a refusal to be assimilated by the masculine Symbolic of language and code, despite the small successes of his recent limited dabbling in it. His affinity with the garden space of Alice's house is based on his recognition in it of his own sense of style, acquired before his European sojourn, and here preserved as a tribute to the subtlety of a previous era.

The nature of various kinds of space and the identities associated with them is the controlling metaphor in "The Jolly Corner"; on the widest plane there is the tension between what America and Europe 'mean' respectively; locally, the relations among smaller spaces are opposed. The corner house, previously central both in Brydon's life and typical of the dwellings of a certain residential class whose maintenance was independent of labour, is now dwarfed physically by the nearby towers of the business class, and figuratively by the diminished position of those who inherit money in comparison with the new status of those who generate it through competition. And Alice's house, marginal in the current, capitalist sense, is central in what it represents to Brydon: an entry into a past whose forms and delicacies America has lost, and which is now benignly guarded by another female threshold figure, Alice Staverton.

Space, in this story, is a marker of identity, and the array of spaces along with the figures metonymically associated with them must be acknowledged before Brydon's questing behaviour can be understood. Some of these spaces are identified explicitly; Alice's house, for example, is described in Edenic detail, and is Brydon's new *locus amoenus*, a sensual but pre-sexual garden over which Alice reigns modestly, representing the best kind of compromise by preserving the past but venturing out into the brutal present when practical matters necessitate an excursion. New York is described in all its excessive modernity, but the skyscrapers that loom over the city are mentioned via a sort of visual preterition, as monoliths with no interiority. Like Europe-in-quotation-marks, these bureaucratic towers must be 'filled in' by the reader in order to supply an opposition to the valorizing of the past that is Brydon's chief indulgence. Otherwise, we hear only one side of the argument.

Photographs of the era show that it was common in New York at this time to see townhouses nestled in the shadows of the new skyscrapers, as private building lots were acquired haphazardly by newly founded or expanded corporations when these properties came on the market. Zoning practices adhered to no constant standard, and single-family residences that we would call mansions were either razed or converted with little regard for neighbourhood aesthetics or architectural continuity. In such a jumbled landscape it is easy to see the towers of commerce as embodying the New York of the future; they may exhibit outlandish and incongruous neo-Gothic or Romanesque facades, but by virtue of their scale and cost they are uniquely American. And the businesses that inhabit them constitute the capitalist, competitive engine that runs the new American economy. In contrast, deserted private dwellings like Brydon's are a symbol of an immature, almost

colonialist preoccupation with the past, and with the European origins of the United States. (Aboriginal America would have been considered an oxymoron.) The black and white tiles of the grand vestibule of the corner house—the very decorative feature that represents Brydon's "birth into style" is an allusion to and imitation of the European past, and the house itself is testament of the decaying and anti-capitalist idea of the distribution of wealth by class via lineage, a manifestly anti-American model that smacks of the European aristocratic system so thoroughly rejected by the Constitution.

By contrast, the nearby office towers are the result of the founding, differentiating principle of the United States: free market capitalism. One could sink or one could swim, based on wit, nerve, and acumen—regardless of family history or connections. In theory, a boy from the Bowery could become a railroad magnate if only, like a Horatio Alger protagonist, he learned and applied the rules of capitalism early and vigorously enough. Pure capitalism is as illusory as pure communism, of course, and many of the era's famous American millionaires had in fact established themselves through all manner of graft, bribery, grey-market involvement, and blatant criminal activity. However, by the turn of the century the American myth was entrenched, and its implicit judgment of individuals—male individuals, at least—was operative. One of the effects of Brydon's escape from America is that he has never had to be measured on this competitive scale. Whatever his occupations in "Europe," he has missed the development of the fundamental characteristic of a new species, *homo americanus.*

This creature might as easily have been called *homo bureaucratus*; his proving ground was not the small family-owned shoe repair shop, in which one's wife may help with the books, and one's children make deliveries—that would be much closer to

Brydon's own origins in the decaying European model of inherited income through clan association. The American male's worth, in this place and time, is tested in corporate life, by his conduct in and manipulation of the bureaucracy, housed in the gleaming new towers of the urban twentieth century. Privilege through lineage is anathema to this theoretically egalitarian social system; in a meritocracy the most contemptible transgressor is the nepotist, or his beneficiary. The functionally Darwinian nature of the model ensures that in principle at least, non-productive or parasitic elements will fall away (through dismissal or disgrace) and those that remain will strive as one toward the collective goal of the survival, and ideally the superiority, of the bureaucratic organism.

At the end of the working day, however, this male collective organism disperses into its constitutive elements who present themselves socially as a *nouveau riche* presence, and whose vitality crowds out the anemic remains of old New York's monied families. It is no surprise that Spencer Brydon, himself a remnant of one of these families, would look with some horror on those structures that house the usurpers of his youthful privilege. Though the reader remains almost constantly in sympathy with Brydon, it must be acknowledged that he is not a typically sympathetic character (though a typically Jamesian male). Officious and effete, he moves along the city streets as if holding a scented handkerchief to his nose, horrified at almost everything he sees, from the behaviour of the citizenry to the street-cars, "the terrible things that people scramble for, as the panic-stricken at sea scramble for the boats (556). He complains about the American loss of susceptibility to the "delicate feelings" he has apparently honed during his European years—as if Europe had ever been immune to the crass concerns of money. What actually seems to horrify him is the egalitarian American ethos, and the fact that

here money is in the *process* of being generated, rather than having been obtained through inheritance and maintained as the principal from which an income may be derived. In New York, the beneficiaries of an income have the poor taste to actually generate those funds by working day to day, in the very skyscrapers that threaten to crowd out the grandiose private dwellings of which the one on the jolly corner is typical.

In the event of his repatriation, Brydon would almost certainly not become a member of the bureaucratic system; he is as far as we know unqualified for any sort of employment other than the appreciation of art and good taste, both of which he finds in short supply in the city he once recognized as his own. However, he could never have escaped being judged socially in comparison with those robust capitalist manipulators who now comprise the city's smart set. By the incomprehensible new standards he would have been found lacking, the very financial ease in which he has always lived now serving as an indictment, an indicator of decadence.

On the level of personality, his seething emotional state, which would become evident at some point, would render the perception of him downright womanly. The preceding three decades have not been kind to the emotional freedom of American men; the functioning of a social system organized through bureaucracy demands behaviour on the part of its participants that is codified and universalistic: decisions are made globally and theoretically, not emotionally. Advancement and demotion are implemented through merit, not through emotional appeal. Most importantly, the bureaucratic personality is "methodical, rational, prudent, disciplined, unemotional, and preoccupied with conformity to expectations." [1] Brydon possesses some of this emotional reserve through

[1] R.K. Merton (1957), *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe, Ill. Rev. edn. Free Press, 195-206 (qtd. in Greenberg and Bystryn)

what he would consider breeding, but in effect the essential difference between him and the current American man can be expressed architecturally; like the skyscrapers he inhabits, their pseudo-historical facades covering a relentlessly modern structure, *homo americanus* may employ some of the trappings of his European ancestors—the evening wear, the dining habits—but in essence he is a new species, a race with no history but that of economics. Brydon is just the reverse, having deliberately assumed the European mantle in order to efface an American essence. For him the façade *is* the substance, or has been until now. Divested of it, he is wary of what might be perceived underneath.

The bureaucratic personality is meant to be mechanistic and transparent. For such a dynamic to remain viable, it must not only operate on objective, non-affective motives, but must also be *perceived* as doing so. Therefore, all interaction among the (exclusively male) members of such a system must be overtly distanced and free of personal alliance of any kind, especially those of love, loyalty, or passion. The young American male of the twentieth century whose parents and schools wished him to be considered successful therefore inculcated in him a devaluing of male-male relationships, excepting those acquaintanceships that might serve as useful contacts in a future business career. The result of this training is that in the early-twentieth-century United States, "the *bureaucratic* personality is essentially what writers on gender have portrayed as the *male* personality" (Greenberg and Bystryn 96). And the non-bureaucratic, dynastic personality is non-male, whether in fact or by perception. Further, the solidification of this masculine paradigm has taken place during Brydon's absence in Europe:

> The years from 1880 to 1920 saw not only an appreciable growth in the average number of employees per [manufacturing] plant, but also a rationalization of work

> organization and the tightening of lines of hierarchical authority. Thus it is only in the last century that most men would have been exposed as adults to workplace socialization of a sort that would inhibit emotional or physical involvement with other men (Greenberg and Bystryn 99).

It is clear that if Brydon wishes to reclaim his American identity, he must recover the self an American life would have made of him—a self capable of achievement independent of lineage, and of the consummation of an interrupted relationship with Alice Staverton.

He is well-motivated, then, in the nocturnal hunt that comprises the long middle section of the story. It is tempting here to see Brydon as a Prufrock rolling his trousers, a milquetoast who hunts "on tiptoe" in "evening shoes" (565), but his search is no idle rumination. Brydon needs to know what he would have been had he stayed in America, because without that measuring of the potential against the actual, he cannot know whether his entire adult life has been one of growth into a legitimate maturity or one of simple evasion, a static, self-indulgent dallying in the sheltering anonymity of Europe.

The action in this section of the story is limited and repetitive. There is, however, a barrage of articulated thought and impression, and this trains the reader in the credibility of Brydon's hunt. There is a (subjectively) reasonable motive for prowling through a deserted townhouse "like some monstrous stealthy cat" night after night. We come to feel as he does, that "his consistency was proof against the cynical light of New York" (567). While the reality of the apparitions of "Owen Wingrave" and *The Turn of the Screw* may be debatable, the object of Brydon's hunt is certainly a prosopopoeial creation. This may not prevent its effect from reaching through into reality; when Brydon stands paralyzed before the closed door of the most isolated room at the top of the house,

neither he nor the reader is sure that the door had previously been open, or if so, who has closed it.

What we do know is that the possibility of the phantom's power to act in the real world is enough to turn the tables on Brydon. He may actually have to face his American self, a measuring that Brydon suddenly and instinctively seeks to avoid. Now, "his instinct was all for mildness" (575) and his only thought is of escape. He is after all no more a hunter than he was a building contractor; as the story opens he is "ready to climb ladders [and] walk the plank" (556), so attuned are his instincts to the masculine art of building; but suddenly these markers of erection fail him: "be long ladder and dangling rope as absent as they would, he saw himself uncontrollably insanely fatally take his way to the street" (575).

He ultimately opts for the conventional means of exit, however, and descends the grand staircase to the vestibule. In the front door, at the threshold between private, residential space and the "cynical light of New York," stands the phantom, "a man of his own substance and stature wait[ing] there to measure himself with his power to dismay" (576). Contrary to grammatical logic, we understand that the phantom is waiting to "measure" Brydon, or as it turns out, for Brydon to measure himself against the phantom. Brydon's interpretation of the spectre is rooted in misinterpretation; what he initially sees as "defiance" turns out to be "dark deprecation" (577). This misreading destabilizes Brydon's subsequent observations for the reader, who has already witnessed Brydon's creation of the phantom as his prey, a prey who, once cornered, in turn corners Brydon—not with the evil intent of a Quint or a murderous old general—but with the weapon of its own abjection. The phantom is cowering in the spectacle of its own hyper-masculine

exaggeration, and yet it covers its face with "splendid" hands—no less splendid, evidently, for the loss of two fingers which appear to Brydon to have been "accidentally shot away" (577). This violent amputation creates further ambiguity around the spectre, who, for all his apparent power and masculinity, has been crippled. (Presumably Brydon's own hands are intact.)

An odd aspect of the phantom's "queer actuality of evening dress" [2] is the presence of "a dangling double eye-glass," which the reader now compares with Brydon's own monocle. If the phantom's ability to perceive is less acute than Brydon's is, then he has taken greater measures to compensate for that impairment. The image of a man staring at horror at another man's 'larger equipment,' however, evokes the idea of a boy's confrontation with the sexuality of the father. Brydon's own father is mentioned preteratively, and only once, in the context of Brydon's emigration to Europe. It seems that the two men parted on less than civil terms, with Brydon following his "perverse young course...almost in the teeth of [his] father's curse" (561). What provoked that curse is unclear; it may have been the young man's refusal to assume his manly American role in the family business (or in the bureaucracy of whatever enterprise provided its income) and his subsequent flight to more genteel climes; or, as in the case of Owen Wingrave's young murdered ancestor, it may have been the father's banishing

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[2] Eve Sedgwick, Michael Moon, and others have pointed to the use of the word 'queer' in discussions of James's protagonists and their relation to homosexuality. I am unconvinced by these references; Partridge's Concise Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English cites the first verifiable usage of the term in this sense as occurring in 1937, twenty-one years after James's death. It is true that the term may well have been current among closed groups before that time, but it seems highly unlikely that James, whose late style is convoluted and subtle almost beyond endurance, would have opted to sprinkle this evocative prose with clumsy, obvious code words as a form of semaphore to other homosexuals.

Savoy suggests that for James, "queerness signifies the uncanny, the circuitous, the displaced that more often than not are locatable in proscribed sexualities and their discursive marking...it...is entirely duplicitous, suspended between denotation and connotation" ("Queer Effects" 234). I would be willing to go this far.

of the perverse as the result of some unspeakable disclosure on the part of the son. At the very least, the father's characterization of Brydon's course as "perverse" identifies the son's life as a straying from the good, the true path—which in this case was the path of the expected and the traditional, a path which would necessarily have included marriage and the perpetuation of the Brydon name, of which Spencer is the final carrier. Brydon Senior owned the house on the jolly corner, and was qualified to live there by dint of his stewardship of the Brydon fortune and his manifest heterosexuality (Spencer's very existence endorses the sexuality of the father); Spencer's inhabiting of the space, as is shown throughout the middle section of the story, is provisional to the point of secrecy and furtiveness. He actually attempts to avoid the police when entering his own property night after night.

As in the apparitional encounters of the governess, Brydon's confrontation with the American self is intense and crowded with detail, but is ultimately visual only. Brydon actually conceives of this vision as a painting within a frame: "No portrait by a great modern master could have presented him with more intensity" (577). The phantom is the antithesis of the threshold figure of the Statue of Liberty, that "mother of all exiles" that welcomes all comers to New York. Brydon's American self, part unintrojected father, part superstitious projection of an exaggerated heterosexuality as imagined by a non-heterosexual, acts as a more ominous threshold figure—one that must be either absorbed or rejected, once and for all, before Brydon can 'qualify' to remain in New York or flee back to Europe upon the completion of his present business. Upon examining the image in the doorway, Brydon decides that "[s]uch an identity fitted his own at no point, made its alternative monstrous" (577). The reader has enough

knowledge of Brydon at this point to be led to the privileged reading that the alternative represented by the phantom is "monstrous," but grammatically the utterance carries opposite meaning: that the alternative to the phantom—that is, the actual Brydon—is in fact the version of the man that is "monstrous." This is in fact the imperative and unbearable dilemma that results in Brydon's fainting; the actual and the possible are equally unacceptable. What he is now is the product of thirty-three years of traveling a perverse trajectory, having turned away from his American origins. What he might have to become in order to qualify as a new American male is simply unpalatable to him; the phantom's "identity fitted his own at no point," including the distant past when Brydon was still a New Yorker living in the city. He has two options, and can choose neither. The tension of this abiding conflict is too much for Brydon; he undergoes a sort of reversal of the mirror stage, witnessing the self that could have been instead of the one that will be. Rather than feeling *jouissance* at this prospect, he is horrified; instead of drawing himself upright, he collapses unconsciousness to the very black and white tiles that have represented his "birth" into style.

He eventually revives, and after a disconcerting glimpse of Mrs. Muldoon, he realizes that "Alice Staverton had made her lap an ample and perfect cushion to him, and that she had to this end seated herself on the lowest degree of the staircase, the rest of his long person remaining stretched on his old black-and-white slabs" (578). He is in the physical attitude of being reborn, feet-first, onto the very spot he has marked as the origin of his identity, and Alice has obliged him, in his unconsciousness, with the only facial-genital contact the two will ever share, that of mother and child at the point of delivery.

The implications are lost on Brydon, who is still recovering his wits, but he does observe the coldness of the tiles, which contrasts with the warmth of this "most wonderful hour" that leaves him "so gratefully, so abysmally passive...dissolved...in the air of the place and producing the golden glow of a late autumn afternoon." He even speaks of this moment as the destination at "the uttermost end of an interminable grey passage" (578.) It is as though an infant were given the ability to articulate the experience of birth, out of the womb and into a welcoming world. Brydon wants another go at this business of identity formation, and his perceptions are framing his revivification as a symbolic rebirth, exactly at ground zero, but before the gender and social expectations of that environment had begun to create such anxiety in him—indeed, before his differentiation from the mother. He luxuriates in this infantile passivity for as long as he dares; it ends when Alice confesses she thought he had died. He replies, "Yes—I can only have died. You brought me literally to life" (579).

It is clear that Alice is more than a beard, a simple hetero-libidinal object that saves a timid Edwardian protagonist from being labeled a latent sodomite; her absence would not necessarily have led to that conclusion, nor does her presence preclude it. Her ostensible role as Brydon's romantic object is difficult to accept; until the last moments of the story, their relationship is intellectual and talky, and on that level Alice shows herself to be more bureaucratic (emotionally conservative, uncommunicative, undemonstrative) than Brydon: Alice Staverton "utterly didn't chatter. She scattered abroad therefore no cloud of words; she could assent, she could agree, above all she could encourage, without doing that" (559-60). Alice is as reticent as Brydon is verbose, and on the linguistic level at least, is the better man for it. Her mode of speech is

extremely abbreviated, and contrasts with Brydon's more extremely than can be accounted for by their having spent three decades on different continents. Alice is a reader-response critic's dream; almost all of her utterances contain ellipses, ambiguities, or aposiopeses.

She appears at the beginning and end of the story, as a frame for the section describing Brydon's nocturnal wanderings, and she acts as a bridge both to the reality of New York outside the house on the jolly corner, and to the city's previous, more genteel incarnation, which they enjoyed together all those years ago. In other words, the present and the past are her domain, while Brydon's future is to be determined by his reaction to the phantom.

Her initial appearance in the story is itself an omission: since Brydon's remark about the onerousness of New York society's idle curiosity is spoken aloud, we know he must have an interlocutor, but we discover her identity only after his monologue, when she is referred to as "Miss Staverton." Near the end of this paragraph she is named as Alice. In this way she is introduced to the reader first as a blank entity, then as a female for whom the formal honorific "Miss" is considered suitable. We then learn her Christian name, which is obviously of biographical significance to James, though apparently not to Brydon. James was extremely careful in choosing characters' names, however, and the name 'Alice' cannot be dismissed simply as a homage to his sister and sister-in-law. 'Alice' was the 'Jennifer' or 'Lisa' of late Victorian England and the thirty or so years surrounding the turn of the century in the United States and Canada, so it would not have aroused special interest in itself. It is inevitable, however, that the association be made with Lewis Carroll's Alice; Barbara Hardy makes the connection explicitly:

"[L]ike... Alice before the looking-glass, Brydon initiates the ghost and the ghost-story. The haunting by a self-styled *alter ego* is initiated by his curiosity and desire, his creative *fiat*" (196). This serves to identify Brydon and Alice Staverton in a shared fantasy, which he enacts by chasing his own White Rabbit through the house night after night. The name is indicative of Staverton's character as complicit in the creation of the phantom, though we learn this only later.

'Staverton' as a word is more enigmatic, though removing the generic 'ton' that denotes the place or 'town' of origin allows the particle 'stave' to stand out in at least two relevant meanings. A stave is a rod or pole, which requires no interpretation in this context, and to stave something off is to attempt to repel it, to defend against it. Is Alice present in order to help create the fantasy whose end will result in Brydon's successful 'staving off' of his desire for the 'pole'? This is congruent with her threshold function in relation to the past, as she stands both for the heteronormative environment he fled thirty-three years ago (and into which she will be his reintegrative bridge should his nocturnal gauntlet proceed as planned) and also for the utopian New York life he could live heterosexually, bureaucratically, following his proven renunciation of the troubling European identity with which he has returned.

As if to prepare the reader for her maternal dynamic in the last section of the story, she is described without sexual characteristics here at the beginning; it is the only description of her that is offered, and is given in the smudged, blurry terms in which the face of a ghost would be described. It is an impression only, and shows a striking lack of awareness of the feminine facial attributes that are usually the focus of men's descriptions of women; Alice may be "a fair young woman who looked older through trouble, or a

fine smooth older one who looked young through successful indifference" (556). There are no pouting lips or flaxen hair in this non-image; there is only a female inhabiting an historical mystery, with a son's focus on the adaptability and endurance of his mother. He goes on to compare her to "some pale pressed flower," and claims that "failing other sweetnesses, she was a sufficient reward of his effort" (556).

The botanical simile serves to further exsanguinate Alice of all sensual meaning, and to connect her with the phantom Brydon. Her domestic space has already been described as a garden, but it is a garden of the past, a *locus amoenus* inside of which the contemporary life of the city can be denied, and from which great stamina is required to leave on the necessary errands that entail intercourse with the vulgar streets. Flowers, particularly blossoms, have been symbols of fertility since long before Freud, of course, with their vaginal petals and phallic stamens, but Brydon's present usage 'de-flowers' that image; a "pale pressed flower" is both faded and desiccated, its beauty a post-mortem beauty—literally ghostly, and its reproductive course run dry. For Alice the bloom may not be off the rose altogether, but the drone of the hedge-clipper can be heard in the distance. For Brydon, Alice is a respected intellectual companion; if he did not consciously flee from a matrimonial relationship with her three decades earlier, then he is certainly less than overwhelmed at her physical presence upon his return.

The flower image is used to describe only Alice and the phantom, and these incidences stand out as organic shapes on the ledger-page of Brydon's present view of the city. He makes this confession to Alice:

> It comes over me that I had then a strange *alter ego* deep down somewhere within me, as the full-grown flower is in the small tight bud, and that I just took the

course, I just transferred him to the climate, that blighted him for once and for ever (562).

Brydon is wondering aloud if his emigration to Europe may have stunted or killed the self he might have been had he remained in New York, and Alice responds with a similar confession, announcing her belief that his American 'flower' would have been "quite splendid, quite huge and monstrous" (562). Brydon has used another botanical figure to conceptualize the phantom, but unlike the ghost image of the "pale pressed flower," which depicts beauty in death, the metaphor he employs in the description of the phantom is dynamic, and evokes the flower at the beginning of its sexual viability. Alice, as the ghost of the past, becomes a sort of bride of Frankenstein as she is linked in image to the phantom Brydon as ghost of the future. These are the only botanical figures in the story, and the real Brydon is excluded from them.

The reader is not privy to the thoughts or intentions of Alice Staverton, except in so far as they are inferred by Brydon himself. This allows Alice a great deal of semantic freedom, and her direct utterances are often cryptic to the point that the reader wonders at Brydon's patience with her. To the contrary, he appears to consider her linguistic coyness a manifestation of the salutary discretion of an earlier age. After one of her characteristic aposiopeses, chopped off after a single subordinate phrase, he opines: "But, quite beautifully, she had too much tact to dot so monstrous an *i*, and it was precisely an illustration of the way she didn't rattle" (560). Her next, similarly truncated remark serves several functions. When Brydon claims to have not the "ghost" of a reason for moving into the house permanently, she asks, "Are you very sure the 'ghost' of one doesn't, much rather, serve--?" (560) This is an example of what Hardy terms the

"telepathic" nature of the love between the two (198); Brydon has by now begun his obsession with the phantom, and he experiences the feeling of having been caught or found out upon hearing this remark, which also introduces the possibility that the nature of his specific manifestation of the phantom will be at least partially constituted by Alice's suggestion of it. He might literally become the man of her dreams.

Brydon confesses now to Alice that he wonders what a life in New York would have "made" of him; and in a tantalizingly preteritive illustration of his curiosity, he tells her that he remembers how it felt when "once or twice, after judging best, for reasons, to burn some important letter unopened" (561). For "reasons"? The reader, unlike Alice, is immediately distracted from the matter the characters are discussing, and imagines when and under what possible circumstances Brydon might have decided that information addressed to him was better destroyed than disclosed. The reasonable conclusion, given what we know of him, is that his refusal of communication was due to his desire to extricate himself from some unhealthy, destructive relationship that he considered dangerous either emotionally or in terms of his reputation. The specifics of these circumstances could not help but illuminate the ways in which his European life has affected his identity, but the reader is denied that information, and Alice perversely passes over this legitimate point of interrogation—perhaps because she can guess the nature of the situation to which Brydon refers.

Alice, somewhat wistfully it seems, offers that an American Brydon would have had "power" (562), and when he asks if she would have preferred him that way, she refuses to clarify her response: "How should I not have liked you?" (562). Brydon, nonplussed, simply moves on, but the reader cannot help but ponder the ambiguity of her

reply, an utterance that is uncanny in its repetition, its second occurrence mirroring the first, but with a semantic indeterminacy that leaves its two incidences not quite identical. Does she mean that she could not have prevented herself from liking him if he had stayed in New York and become a scion of the financial bureaucracy that rules the city, and the new century? Or does she simply mean that no matter how he had developed in his mature life she would have liked him in the way she did at the time of his emigration? The reader is given no interpretation—not even Brydon's.

Alice's elliptical idiolect now begins to appear passive-aggressive. "How should I not have liked you?" is a dig, an accusation. Her real question is, "Why did you waste these thirty-three years of my life, when it's obvious that nothing has changed, and that we can pick up where we left off?" And Brydon's answer, should he have chosen to engage the accusation honestly, would have been that the responsibility for that waste was hers alone. Certainly there is nothing textual that indicates communication between them—or at least from him to her—during his European years. He has made no request that she wait for his return. At this point he does the chivalrous thing, however, and indicts himself: "...I was leading, at any time these thirty years, a selfish frivolous scandalous life. And you see what it has made of me" (562). But Alice does not let him off the hook: "She just waited, smiling at him." This decision on her part is meant to force Brydon to believe that he has made an utterance that somehow resounds more globally than he can fathom, that there is in fact a disparity in their "communities of knowledge," and after this period of waiting, of silence, she nails her point home: "You see what it has made of *me*" (562).

But what it has made of her is unclear. She is nearly as out of place in New York as Brydon is, despite having lived there throughout her life. What she might have been as the wife of the American Brydon may understandably preoccupy her, but Brydon at least has known from the beginning that this fantasy on her part is futile: "nothing was now likely, he knew, ever to make her better off than she found herself, in the afternoon of life" (556). This story is not concerned with Alice's past conditional, however, nor with the person she might have become had she lived in Europe for three decades. After deflecting her last, wry comment by referring to her flower-like "perfection [that] nothing else could have blighted" (563), he brings her back on track by returning to the topic of himself, and by asking her if his present identity is as fully realized and satisfactory as it could possibly be, to which she exclaims, "Oh, no! Far from it!" but implies that in her largesse she will accept him in whatever version he is presented to her.

Having been refused the main course, Brydon will now settle for leftovers: "You mean I'm good enough?" But Alice accuses him, with justification, of caring for no one's opinion but his own. Brydon now commits openly to his obsession and announces his determination to know his foresworn identity whether by finding him or by actually creating him. Alice takes this opportune moment to confess her own erotic fantasy while she can credibly couch it in terms of archeology and ectoplasm, and tells Brydon that she has seen the phantom twice, in dreams. Lest he feel flattered or reassured, she establishes clearly that her dream was of the American Brydon, and not of her interlocutor. She balks under his further questioning, and the matter is temporarily closed.

Alice's structural function as the opening frame ends here, and the next fourteen pages are devoted to Brydon's wanderings through the house. But this first section of the

story, in which Alice figures so prominently, establishes several points that will be taken up again when she reappears. We have learned that the relationship between the pair is based (at least in the present) on language and intellect, that their shared "communities of knowledge" result in a highly abbreviated mode of conversation in which it is taken on faith that one will understand the other more fully through unspoken implications than through simple articulation—a faith that may not be totally justified after a three-decade separation. We have also seen Alice in full control of their communication, at once concealing and expressing her resentment of and enduring desire for whichever Brydon eventually materializes in a stable and permanent form. And most importantly for the manifest story, we learn that the phantom, when he makes his debut at the door of the house, cannot be dismissed as a simple hallucination, because Alice has seen him too.

Alice returns in the third and final section of the story, posed virtually in the birthing position in relation to the recumbent, stupified Brydon. The dialogue that follows is a document of passivity on his part, a nearly ceremonial deferral of personal volition to Alice; he announces that she has "brought [him] literally to life" (579) and then implores her: "Oh keep me, keep me!" in response to her ominously possessive declaration that she intends to do just that. During this moment of maternity on Alice's part and abjection on Brydon's, a kiss transpires, but without a trace of romance. The kiss is described in terms of "charity," "virtue," and "beatitude," the pious adjectives of the Virgin Mother, not of the erotic object.

The mechanics of how Alice has come to be at the house are explained; she confesses her conviction that Brydon had seen his phantom self, and when he protests that the "black stranger" wasn't him at all, she expresses her gratitude for that fact.

Brydon, however, detects "some particular meaning blurred by a smile" (580). Her ostensible meaning is that the Brydon in her lap is preferable to the phantom, but the second, "blurred" meaning remains; she is mourning the loss of the phantom, the version of Brydon to whom she is aligned by the author through the botanical image, and by herself through her repeated erotic dream of him. The phantom is brutish, but to her, almost alluring in his hypermasculinity; the actual Brydon, especially in this final section, is infantalized and abject, relegating her to the role of mother almost regardless of her wishes.

And so the ending is happy, if the repatriation of Brydon at any cost constitutes happiness. He is reunited with Alice, who appears to accept him as the man Europe allowed him to be, because those are now the only terms on which he is available to her. Her love has not heterosexualized him, because it is the love of a mother, not of a romantic partner. Alice's erotic aspirations have vanished with the phantom Brydon. When she murmurs, "He isn't you—no, he isn't—*you*!" (582), it is difficult to tell whether she is celebrating or mourning. She has, at least, after thirty-three years of waiting, one of the Brydons to take back to her garden-home, a space that could hardly contain the American phantom.

Brydon, for his part, has looked himself in the eye and rejected what he saw. The vague hopes and inquietudes raised by his limited success in American commerce have been put to rest, and if he is to stay in New York it must be as the man he was when he arrived there. As much as he sought to distance himself from the absences that defined him in New York—his non-American, non-capitalist, non-heterosexual identity—he has

finally confronted the great absence that has haunted him since his emigration: the Brydon that may have been. And that prospect was worse than all the others.

His project of perversion management through compartmentalization is a failure. The psyche is not modular, nor the libido a component that can be snapped out and updated at the user's convenience. When Brydon implores Alice to "keep" him, he means to keep him despite the fact that he comes with his perversions intact. She acquiesces, because in the pre-sexual, pre-twentieth century space she represents, the romantic is more important than the erotic. And if Brydon is to stay in New York, it must be within the confines of a space in which the American expectations of him that caused his flight all those years ago do not return to plague him again. Alice understands this, and their happy ending, crippled and compromised as it is, is the best they can do together.

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